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Making Sense of Death

Ritual practices and situational beliefs of the recently bereaved in the Netherlands

Brenda Mathijssen

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CONTENTS

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Dear mom, dad, Annique and Rob, thank you for your endless support and for urging me to follow my heart. And Nick, last but not least, your love and creativity light up my days. I can't wait to discover the adventures ahead with you.

This storm is you. Something inside of you. So all you can do is give in to it, step right inside the storm, closing your eyes and plugging up your ears so the sand doesn't get in, and walk through it, step by step. There's no sun there, no moon, no direction, no sense of time. Just fine white sand swirling up into the sky like pulverized bones.

[…]

And once the storm is over you won't remember how you made it through, how you managed to survive. You won't even be sure, in fact, whether the storm is really over. But one thing is certain. When you come out of the storm you won't be the same person who walked in. That's what this storm's all about.

Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

RITUAL PRACTICES AND SITUATIONAL BELIEFS OF THE RECENTLY BEREAVED IN THE NETHERLANDS

Losing a loved one is a universal and often poignant experience, confronting people with the reality of death in their everyday lives. When life vanishes a quest for meaning emerges among those who are left behind, accompanied by a flood of emotions. The rupture torn in the social fabric and everyday lives of the bereaved must be repaired, and something must be done with the decomposing corpse. Although the bereaved face up to these challenges in diverse ways, depending on the particular context and circumstances involved, the event of death cannot be avoided nor neglected. Regardless of who you are, where you live, and what you believe in, it demands a social and cultural answer from the living. Therefore, in response to the precarious passage that both the deceased and the bereaved undergo, people enact ritual repertoires (Grimes 2000, 5). These repertoires enable people to make sense of death. The question of how people seek and create meaning in the face of death, through ritual, is central to this study.

Death ritual is always shaped by the context wherein it is situated. In many western contexts today, repertoires are known for their life-affirming and personalised character (Adamson & Holloway 2013). Research has shown that personalised funerary practices have emerged in relation to various oscillating social developments, predominantly the changing location of religion in society and in the lives of individuals, and the increased emphasis on the lifestyles, voices, and choices of the bereaved and the deceased (Walter 2012; Davies 2015). In the last two decades, tailor-made ceremonies have become the most prominent form of funerals in the Netherlands (Venbrux et al. 2013), characterised by ritual creativity and a large amount of personal choice, and enhanced by the consumer-oriented death care industry (Venbrux et al. 2008; Venbrux et al. 2009). In ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals, the bereaved are increasingly celebrating the life of the deceased (Quartier 2007; Wojtkowiak 2011).[1]

[1] A similar trend has been observed in other countries, notably the United Kingdom (Walter 2005; Cook & Walter 2005; Caswell 2011; Holloway et al. 2013; Davies 2015; Bailey & Walter 2016), Belgium

The ritual repertoires that emerge in the face of death also acquire their distinctive features from legal frameworks, local possibilities, and available services. Because of the relatively late legislation of cremation in the Netherlands, in 1955, cremation numbers tripled between 1970 (14%) and 1990 (44%) (LVC 2016), and the rise of cremation thus coincided with the changing role of religion in society.[2] The appearance of crematoria as new places to conduct funerals created possibilities to address people's dissatisfaction with 'formal' ecclesial ceremonies, literally providing space for tailor-made performances. The new possibilities surrounding ash disposals, which resulted from amendments of the Dutch Burial and Cremation Act in the 1990s, further enhanced, and were influenced by, the ritual creativity that began to thrive from the 1980s onwards (Venbrux et al. 2009). These post-cremation rituals not only left their mark on the outlook of the funeral ceremony, but also acquired a place in the everyday lives of the bereaved.

In the Netherlands today, ecclesial and non-ecclesial death rituals are thus inevitably shaped by the changing role of religion, the process of individualisation in society (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 6), and the development of modern cremation. Altering the character and outlook of ritual repertoires, these oscillating developments have not only enhanced the variety of ritual possibilities, but also pose challenges to the workings of death ritual.

1 Research problem: Death and meaning-making

The concept of death ritual can be understood in terms of structure and meaning (Bell 1997, 23ff; Ladd 2007). In the same way a poem cannot be grasped bereft of its form, neither can the meaning of ritual practice. To make ritual 'work' both aspects are fundamental, and subject to the context wherein ritual is situated.

In terms of structure, death ritual is internally organised and creates an external, ordering effect (Quartier 2007). In ritual itself, one can observe a sequence of actions following a specific course. Therefore, ritual is often presented as a stable "time-honoured custom" (Bell 1997, 210). Although it is associat-

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(Vandendorpe 2000), the United States (Laderman 2003; Ramshaw 2010), Canada (Emke 2002), and New Zealand (Schäfer 2007). However, highly individualised ceremonies are not the status quo in all 'Western' societies. In countries like Germany and Denmark, for example, the authority of religion is more prominent in relation to funerals and disposal practices. Furthermore, their features vary from one country to another (Venbrux et al. 2009).

[2] This is, for example, quite different in the United Kingdom, where cremation was legalised in 1902, and where the strongest rise in cremation numbers occurred before the 1980s. In the early 1980s, two-thirds of the British were cremated after death (Davies & Mates 2005).

ed with being old and traditional, ritual is everything but static and unchanging. Its form is inevitably shaped by the particular circumstances involved. In addition to being structured, ritual allows people to create a temporal, spatial, and social structure. Ritual frames time and the experience of time, it shapes the spatial environment, and it orchestrates a social fabric among the ritual participants. The internal and external structure of death ritual thus allows people to regain a sense of grip and control, which has previously been disrupted by the confrontation with death (Quartier 2011, 148).

The structure of death ritual intertwines with its symbolic meaning (Bell 1992, 30). Death ritual consists of various actions, gestures, objects, persons, and places which can become vehicles of ritual symbols. Considering the weight of the word 'symbol', we must clarify what is meant by it in this study. First and foremost, a symbol communicates (Womack 2005, 1). It represents something else and shares in the power of that which it represents (Turner 1973). A coffin, for example, can become a symbol of death, metonymically, on the basis of what it contains. At the ideological pole of symbolic meaning, it represents death, concealing and revealing it. Simultaneously, at its sensory pole, it shares in the powers and emotions that are associated with death, such as danger and impurity, influencing the way in which the coffin is treated within the context of a ritual (Davies 2015, 23; 2008, 24; Turner 1973).

In death ritual one can observe many symbols, each of which has multiple meanings (Turner 1973, 1100–1101). A symbol's meaning, therefore, is not fixed like a sign (Jung 1956, 124). Only part of a symbol's "full semantic wealth" is communicated in a particular ritual context, whilst other meanings remain hidden in the symbolic vehicle (Turner 1973, 1101). Symbols, thus, have an appropriateness, conveying specific knowledge and cultural narratives (Adamson & Holloway 2013, 142). In addition to being polysemic, a symbol can mean different things to different people, so that it works (or fails) as an instrument through which people bind themselves together (Bourdieu 1991, 166). Through the use of ritual symbols, ritual participants aspire to communicate beyond the naturally associated meanings of objects, persons, and gestures, and beyond the actual performance itself (Grimes 2014, 319). Images of day and night, for instance, are recognisable because of, but do not point to, the twenty-four-hour course of the day in death ritual. Rather, they might say something about life, death, and rebirth (Van Gennep 1909/ 1960). In the face of death, ritual symbols thus enable people to express their most important social, cultural,

and religious values (Metcalf & Huntington 1991), transcending the present by establishing a connection between the past and the future.[3]

If ritual succeeds in terms of structure and meaning, it can then become meaningful. To make ritual succeed, however, is no easy task. To accomplish its goal, the structure and meaning of ritual must have a sense of recognisability (Quartier 2007). The ritual actions, gestures, objects, persons, and places have to appeal to the participants, and cannot be a far cry from their frame of reference. In Dutch society today, the structure and meaning of death ritual are not simply taken for granted, but actively constructed. They are being sought, made, and evaluated upon by the ritual actors involved (Holloway et al. 2013, 44–46). There is a constant dialectic between people's global meaning-making system – their goals, values, and beliefs – and the situational meaning regarding a specific instance, which might challenge the global system (Park 2013, 40). In practice we therefore can observe a dynamic meaning-making process, which not only reveals the impact of shifting social and cultural circumstances on death ritual, but also illuminates the fact that ritual plays a role in shaping the values of the context in which it is situated (Geertz 1973, 94–98).

This study examines the meaning-making practices of the dearest and nearest, those recently bereaved, in relation to death ritual's structure and meaning. It thereby focuses on three major developments in the Dutch context, which together pose poignant challenges to the workings of death ritual: the changing role of religion, the individualisation of society, and the development of modern cremation.

2 The Dutch context

The Netherlands is a fascinating context within which to study the dynamics of death ritual – that is, the body of practices in and around death ritual "including its consequences and changes through time" (Grimes 2014, 340). Rites have emerged in the Netherlands, shaped by a dialectic of top-down and bottom-up negotiations, and traditional forms of ritual are being increasingly marginalised (Post 2005; Post & Molendijk 2007, 279). The changing role of religion, the in-

[3] When exploring ritual symbols in death ritual, it is helpful to distinguish between three dimensions of ritual symbols as we encounter them in the field (Turner 1973, 1103). First, ritual symbols have a positional dimension. In a ritual context they are used with other symbols, and the relationship between symbols is an important source of their meaning. Second, they have an exegetical dimension. We can grasp the meaning of a symbol by examining the explanations of that symbol given by the ritual participants, both ritual experts as well as the bereaved. Third, ritual symbols have an operational dimension. By observing what ritual participants do with a symbol, and how they relate to one another in this process, we can study how their meaning is enacted.

dividualisation of society, and the development of cremation, have fundamentally altered the ways people perform, experience, and understand death ritual in particular, as well as life and death in general (Venbrux, Peelen & Altena 2009). In this study, it is not our aim to illustrate 'the' Dutch way of dealing with death. This indeed would be a utopian pursuit, as contemporary dealings with death are highly individualised. Rather, we wish to illustrate how people negotiate and shape their ritual practices in view of the situation at hand, in the context of shifting circumstances in society. To do so, we will first provide some context by describing the three oscillating developments that have gained ground in Dutch society, most notably from the second half of the 20th century onwards, in relation to death ritual.

2.1 The changing role of religion and self

Although the Netherlands is currently viewed as highly secularised, in terms of traditional belief and religious belonging, only sixty years ago it was one of the most Christian countries in Europe (Van Rooden 2010). Its pillarisation at the beginning of the 20th century, whereby society was strongly organised along political and denominational lines, meant that religion was interwoven with most aspects of daily life. The main pillars – Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Social Democratic – could clearly be differentiated, each having their own media, political parties, leisure, education, healthcare, and funerary services. Inspired by the socialistic agenda and the rise of the labour movement, and evolving from the funeral bursaries of the former guild system, local funeral associations and funeral funds emerged. These organisations, often related to religious denominations, made funeral and burial services feasible and accessible to a wide group of people, and thus played a profound role in providing funeral care to the deceased and their bereaved (Kok 2005, 212–223).

By the 1960s the segmentation of society had been largely broken down and the presiding role of the churches in the Netherlands, and hence in death ritual, had begun to change. From the 1970s onwards, the numbers of church attendance and religious affiliation declined rapidly, from sixty-seven percent in 1966 to thirty-two percent in 2015 (Bernts & Berghuijs 2016, 23), and the authority of churches started to diminish (De Graaf & Te Grotenhuis 2008). Whereas religion – its institutions, experts, communities, and traditions – had once provided people with a rich collection of rites and meta-narratives to deal with the pertinent questions and ambiguities of life and death, it now began to loosen its hold. The Netherlands became increasingly 'unchurched' (Davie

2002, 5; 2000, 8) and religious identities, practices, and beliefs came to be understood as a choice, rather than something assigned (Burén 2015). Increasingly, people began to evaluate and practice "their religiosity in non-traditional, individualised and institutionally loose ways" (Berger 2001, 340; cf. Giddens 1991), resulting not only in religious pluralism and the pluralism of religious and secular coexistence (Berger 2014), but also in the pluralism of the de-differentiation of the religious and the secular (Woodhead 2016).[4]

Although the presiding role of religious institutions disappeared, the quest for meaning, particularly in the face of death, continued to be profound. Not the absence of meaning-making, but the disappearance of suitable frameworks to shape the process of meaning-making started to pose challenges to the bereaved as well as to ritual experts in practice. When traditional funerals no longer met the lifestyle requirements of the bereaved and began to lose their recognisability and even plausibility, they were subdued to experimentation and ritual innovation.[5] Liturgical frameworks could no longer be simply taken off-the-shelf and in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches challenges emerged

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[4] The concepts of "the religious" and "the secular" have multiple meanings. They are often related to other concepts, such as secularism and secularisation, and are used at various levels and in different domains, for instance, in relation to worldviews, doctrines, and ideologies of statecraft and institutions, as well as individual practices and beliefs (Casanova 2011). Also, what people understand to be "the religious" or "the secular" changes over time (Asad 2003); think, for example, of the distinction between the "religious-spiritual-sacred world of salvation" and the "secular-temporal-profane world" in medieval Christendom, including the religious and secular clergy (Taylor 2011, 56). Furthermore, the academic concepts of "the religious" and "the secular" have developed in a Western context, and are hence based on, and biased by, norms of religious behaviour and organisation in Western Europe and the United States (McGuire 2008, 24; Ruel 2005).
In this study, the concepts of "the religious" and "the secular", as well as the concepts of "religion" and "non-religion", are approached from a *lived* perspective. Thus, it is *not* our aim to demarcate and define what is religious and secular, but rather to illustrate that these terms mean different things to different people in different contexts, varying from "being irreligious", in relation to a particular statement or topic, to using such a term to express one's hostility to "the church". We are interested in the impact of the changed social location of religion in the Netherlands in relation to death ritual, and the changed place of religion in the everyday lives of the recently bereaved (McGuire 2008, 24). We thereby think of religion, following Robert Orsi, as "the practice of making the invisible visible, of concretising the order of the universe, the nature of human life and destiny, and the various dimensions and possibilities of human interiority itself, as these are understood in various cultures at different times, in order to render them visible and tangible, present to the senses in the circumstances of everyday life" (2005, 73–74). Consequently, particular attention is given to the decline of religious authority, that is, the authority of religious institutes: their experts, rituals, and meta-narratives. Above all, not the categories of "the religious" and "the secular" themselves, but the meaning-making processes of people in the face of death are central to this study.

[5] This is not to say that funerals – whether ecclesial or not – before this period were all uniform. Little is known of the actual funeral performances in the Netherlands (micro-history) during the first half of the 20th century. We do know that possibilities emerged to conduct funerals outside of the church system from the mid-19th century, and particularly from the 1920s, onwards. In the northern part of the Netherlands, for instance, we find examples of people speaking at non-ecclesial funerals (Brabers, Markx & Reinders 2006). It is, however, only in the second half of the 20th century that non-ecclesial funerals go 'mainstream'.

regarding the negotiation of tradition and innovation. At the level of institutions, as well as at the level of local communities, renewal was taking place.

During the second Vatican council the existing Tridentine funeral liturgy was reformed. Liturgical hope regarding resurrection and salvation came to outweigh 'medieval' anxieties in the new liturgical format (Hermans 2011; *Nationale Raad voor Liturgie* 1976). In the Netherlands, an atmosphere of renewal had been thriving among church members, pastors, and theologians since the 1950s, and had been supported by the bishops (Nissen 2008; Verstraeten 2010, 435, 443). However, the initiated renewal stagnated in the 1970s and was further discouraged during the following decades (Lukken 2007, 35). In the 1980s, the Special Synod of the Bishops of the Netherlands was held at the request of Pope John Paul II to consider theological and pastoral matters in the Netherlands. Here the ecclesial direction changed, acquiring a more restorative character (Roorda et al. 2006, 240). The Christian identity of the funeral liturgy was reemphasised, and gained preference over an inductive approach focusing on the individual wellbeing of the deceased and the bereaved (Lukken 2007, 36). Diverse views on 'what constitutes a proper Christian funeral' emerged. Pastors were increasingly confronted with the limits of stretching, interpreting, and redefining the prescribed liturgy in view of those involved (Hüsken & Neubert 2011). For whom and for what was the funeral? Such challenges intensified with the course of time, as the bereaved gained voice and became more actively involved in the ritual performance (Mathijssen 2013b). The emergence of a new generation of priests, educated during an era of restauration, has resulted in ongoing challenges and struggles between tradition and innovation (Nissen 2008).

For Protestants, things were on the move as well. The liturgical movement, which had started in the late 19th century and thrived in the first half of the 20th century, continued and developed (Barnard & Post 2008). Questions regarding the role of the churches in a changing, secularising society resulted in collaboration and ultimately in a process of reunification of three Protestant churches: the Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, and the Lutheran Church (Wallet 2005). During this process, liturgical renewal appeared as a fruitful field for cooperation. A new liturgical format, *Proeve voor de eredienst,* was published in 1987, with a first volume on funerals (*Commissie Dienstboek*). Furthermore, after the establishment of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 2004, a new liturgical book, *Het Dienstboek* (2004), emerged, strongly focusing on the values of the bereaved as well as on pastoral care. Similar to the renewed Roman Catholic liturgy, the

Protestant format showed an emphasis on hope regarding resurrection and salvation: "In the face of death, the church […] desires to speak of life. Where a human life has ended, the church celebrates the mystery of Easter, in hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2)" (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 879). Perhaps most notable in the new format, however, was the acknowledgement of the importance of ritual acts in the funeral. Ritual acts could enrich the 'austere' Protestant ritual repertoire, a perspective that echoes the rise of ritual creativity in Dutch society (Venbrux, Heessels & Bolt 2008), as well as the prominent role of the Lutheran Church in the earlier collaborations. In addition to the Word, ritual acts became a means to convey the comfort of Jesus Christ's resurrection (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004, 881–882).[6] In the process of reunification, as well as in the local communities, challenges arose concerning the "correct" ritual performance and its Christian identity. The call to adapt the ritual repertoire to shifting circumstances posed as many questions for Protestant as for Catholics. However, the non-prescriptive nature of the Protestant liturgical formats and the more democratic ecclesial structure of the former Calvinistic churches, in comparison to the Roman Catholic Church, left more space for negotiation in practice.

Regardless of the liturgical renewal and creativity at several levels in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, they lost their sovereignty in performing rites of passage in the Netherlands. By the 1990s the role of Christianity in the public sphere and in death ritual had massively declined. Being increasingly viewed as individuals, rather than members of a (religious) group or institution (cf. Heelas & Woodhead 2005), people had distanced themselves from the "authoritative package of religious denominations" (Woodhead 2016, 42). Retaining some religious labels or elements – for example, being Dutch reformed or performing life-cycle rituals – people rejected other aspects, such as church membership or the belief in God (Woodhead 2016, 46). Furthermore, numerous possibilities emerged allowing the search for other sources of meaning, identity, and community, which were strongly enhanced by popular culture and the internet, particularly social-networking media. Thus, today, a culture can be observed wherein "roles, duties, obligations, as well as affiliations, meanings, and identities are defined on the basis of personal subjectivities" (Burén 2015, 65).

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[6] Although a new liturgical format was introduced in 1987 and 2004, ministers also used the older formats belonging to their specific denomination, as well as formats they had created themselves.

These circumstances influenced the structure and meaning of funerary practices. The enlarged disengagement with regular churchgoing meant that participation in funerals was no longer based on the social and religious fabric of the church community (Quartier 2007). Rather, funerals brought together a more heterogeneous group of people from a variety of backgrounds, being connected by means of social relationships with the deceased and/or the bereaved. Religious symbols, images, and narratives lost their sovereignty and recognisability, as their transmission and routinisation in the collective setting of the church diminished (Whitehouse 2004). Thus, meaning-making, in Dutch society in general, and in funerals in particular, became increasingly private and diverse, often situated in-between 'the religious' and 'the secular'. In view of people's 'lifestyle' (Davies 2015, 26), informal and personalised dealings with death became profound. To make death ritual 'work', it had to be tailor-made with regards to the deceased, the bereaved, and the heterogeneous group of funeral participants.

2.2 Filling the void: professionalised funeral care

By the 1990s, the initial funeral funds and organisations had developed into a network of highly specialised and consumer-oriented undertaking businesses, providing a wide range of facilities and services, and creating professional funeral care that makes customised funerals possible (Venbrux et al. 2009, 97–98; 2008; 2013). Avoiding challenges regarding Christian identity and religious authority, these undertaking businesses answered the demand for 'do-it-yourself' or 'personalised' funerals, coming from a society wherein the voice and choice of the individual increasingly took centre stage (Woodhead 2016, 44; Sax et al. 1989; Van den Akker 1995; Enklaar 1995). The declining role of institutionalised religion in relation to death thus intertwined with the individualisation of death ritual and the organisation of funeral enterprises (Walter 2005, 176).

If one wants to understand the ways wherein people ritually respond to death in contemporary Dutch society, one cannot overlook the prominent role of the death care industry in shaping and facilitating death ritual. Undertaking businesses have had a major influence on ritual possibilities, and have left a profound mark on private and public understandings of death, as well as on people's notions of 'the good funeral'. Furthermore, in terms of legislation and organisation, the Dutch death care system differs significantly from other European countries, such as Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, as well as the United States. Therefore, we will now shed light on some of its

typical characteristics, providing a context for the analysis of the preparation, performance, and aftermath of funerary practices in this study.

The funeral industry in the Netherlands is highly professionalised and well organised, consisting of branch organisations as well as a variety of funerary enterprises. These enterprises include crematoria and cemeteries, undertaking businesses, and insurance companies. Crematoria and cemeteries are managed by small entrepreneurs, churches, and co-operatives, or are subject to municipal control.[7] With regards to this study, it is particularly the dynamic of Dutch undertaking businesses and insurance companies that is a distinctive one. Undertaking businesses with a commercial, municipal, or co-operative basis exist (Walter 2005, 182; Venbrux et al. 2009), being shaped as associations, trusts, co-operatives, small entrepreneurs, and franchises. Businesses can provide either funeral care or funeral insurance, but, as most insurances pay in kind, many provide both. Institutionally then, insurance and funeral care are often connected in a holding, but separated in the workplace. The three largest national funeral enterprises in the Netherlands – DELA, Yarden, and Monuta – are examples of this.

This combination of funeral care and insurance, together with article 16 of the Burial and Cremation Act that prescribes that the burial or cremation has to take place by the sixth working day after death at the latest, gives the Dutch death care system its well-organised character.[8] Funerary services have to be well arranged, not only in view of a smooth-as-possible funeral process for the bereaved, but also in relation to the limited time frame. Additionally, the existence of insurance policies demands an overview of options and costs. In practice, therefore, funeral directors use a checklist during the arrangement interviews – either on paper or memorised by heart – consisting of products, services, and arrangements that must be dealt with within six working days.

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[7] The ownership of crematoria and cemeteries influences the possibility of mortuary practices taking place on these sites, for instance, the type of grave and the period of grave rest. Each municipality in the Netherlands is bound by law to have a municipal cemetery, which secures having a grave for all inhabitants. Furthermore, the Netherlands does not have a tradition of eternal graves. With the exception of natural burial sites, a few monumental cemeteries, and a few associations providing a very limited number of eternal graves, one does not buy but rent a grave, or more specifically, one rents the right to bury at a particular gravesite. Graves are rented for a period of at least ten years, and people can extend the burial rights for a new period after the term has passed (Venhorst & Mathijssen 2017; Bot 1998).

[8] Until 2010, the burial or cremation had to take place by the fifth day after death at the latest. The period was not extended because the term of five days was seen as problematic, predominantly because of administrative tasks, such as people's applications to extend the five-day term, for the bereaved as well as the professionals. See *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* 2009, 320: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stb-2009-320.html

Moreover, the combination of funeral care and insurance has stimulated the consumer-oriented nature of the death care system. Over two-thirds of Dutch people have a form of funeral insurance (Venbrux et al. 2009), meaning that a majority of people are covered for basic funeral costs, including the internment or the incineration, but not the ash disposal or the tombstone. As the insurance market is thriving, companies are not exclusively looking to attract new people, but are also constantly reflecting upon how to best answer the wishes of their current and future customers. In recent years, an increased emphasis on quality and transparency can therefore be observed in the field, stimulated by branch organisations such as the BGNU and NARDUS. On behalf of the BGNU, for example, a label for professionalised funeral care (SKU) emerged in 2006, and a new training and funeral exam for all undertakers is due to provide its first graduates in 2017. Moreover, now that funerary rituals cannot be simply taken off the shelf, enterprises are looking for ways to educate funeral directors in subjects like meaning-making, and cultural and religious diversity.[9]

In the Netherlands, undertaking businesses are a driving force behind the renewal of the funerary landscape, thereby influencing public notions of death and the 'good' funeral. The large companies advertise on national television, radio, and billboards, with original campaigns that not only promote their services and products, but also open up debate about death. In recent slogans and campaigns, we increasingly find a focus on talking about death during life, and preparing for death during life, as well as on cultural and religious diversity (Venhorst & Mathijssen 2017). This intertwines with the always present notion of the 'personal funeral'. The presence of funeral companies in the public domain, and the high number of people with funeral insurance, not only makes the topic of death discussable, but also influences the particular narrative. The debate has begun to emphasise meaning, rather than topics such as 'beating rising funeral costs', as we find, for example, in England.[10]

Lastly, women have acquired a more prominent role in the Dutch death care industry, changing its outlook and character in the last decades. In many an instance, the 'black crows' have swopped places with 'modern women'. For a

[9] The Dutch funeral organisation Yarden, for example, started in 2014 with preparations for a multicultural funeral home, to provide services for the diverse population of Amsterdam and beyond. Thereby employees are trained in the complexities of cultural diversity (Van der Pijl 2016). At the Dutch funeral organisation DELA, for instance, preparations are being made for sustainable education in meaning-making and cultural diversity.

[10] The funeral costs themselves are naturally part of some debates, and the notion that companies make money out of death is by some seen as problematic. However, as the insurance market is thriving, the topic of funeral costs has nearly become invisible in campaigns today.

long time, professional funeral care in the Netherlands was in the hands of men, also in relation to clerical functions to which women had little access. Women took care of the dead and the survivors, but today they have also become funeral directors, ritual experts, entrepreneurs, crematorium managers, and so on. What is more, many funerary professions are seen as ideal jobs for women, whose female qualities are praised and used as a marketing tool (Venhorst & Mathijssen 2017). The emergent group of 'independent' ritual coaches, that will receive attention in this study, is an example of an area that has become strongly dominated by women.

2.3 The legislation and development of cremation

During the period wherein the role of religion and the position of the individual changed significantly, another development took place that was to fundamentally influence Dutch death rites. By the late 19th century, ideas surrounding cremation had emerged throughout Europe. In 1874, the Association for the Introduction of Cremation in the Netherlands (*De Vereeniging tot Invoering der Lijkenverbranding in Nederland*) was established, aiming to legalise, enable, and bring attention to cremation in the Netherlands. Cremation was first propagated in relation to burial mostly for reasons of hygiene and urbanisation. During the period between 1874 and 1915, however, emotional aspects quickly became more profound in the debate (Franke 1989, 60–65). Cremation was advocated in view of its aesthetics and ethics (Heessels 2012, 18; Cappers 1999, 70–81, 190). Examples of this were revealing slogans that compared burial to cremation, in favour of the latter. The association's efforts proved fruitful, with the first crematorium built in Driehuis in 1913, and the first cremation taking place in 1914. The campaign was now no longer a matter of mere idealism, but also one of actual practice. The thriving socialistic agenda in the Netherlands gave rise to the Workers' Association for Cremation (*Arbeiders Vereeniging voor Lijkverbranding*) in 1919, through which the cremation movement also reached the middle and working classes (Franke 1989, 69).

Nonetheless, it was not until 1955 that the Dutch Burial and Cremation Act was amended and cremation became a legal form of bodily disposal in the Netherlands. Before official legislation, cremation was tolerated and performed in small numbers. The absence of legal regulations resulted in many post-cremation possibilities, following the ideals of the Association (Heessels 2012). Cremated remains found a final destination at cemeteries, but were also taken home or scattered elsewhere. Following legislation, the formal stance of the

churches towards cremation changed in the 1960s. Cremation had been banned by the Roman Catholic Church in decrees of 1886 and 1892, and this was reinforced in 1918 and 1925 (Franke 1989, 43). Choosing a cremation after being admonished had severe consequences, such as the denial of clerical services and sacraments. The Dutch Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands had not officially embargoed the practice, but expressed a clear preference towards burial. Although this preference continued in all churches, which is still visible today, people were soon allowed to decide for themselves. The General Synod of the Reformed Churches accepted cremation in 1961, and the Roman Catholic Church followed suit in 1963 (Heessels 2012; Franke 1989). Over the following years, cremation numbers rose explosively, from 2 percent in 1950 to 14 percent in 1970 (LVC 2016).

The rise of cremation in the Netherlands was strongly interwoven with the decline of church funerals and the increased professionalisation of the funerary landscape. Cremation provided people with a larger amount of choice, and practical possibilities emerged to conduct funerals outside of the churches, in the halls of crematoria. However, the new Burial and Cremation Act also came with restrictions. It was no longer allowed to take the cremated remains home, but the ashes had to remain with professionals who often scattered them anonymously on crematorium fields or at sea (Heessels 2012; Bot 1998; Cappers 1999). As Dutch society became more individualised, people started to object to the dominant role of professionals. The bereaved demanded greater scope in the process of death ritual, the 'do-it-yourself' funeral was promoted (Sax et al. 1989; Enklaar 1995), and funeral companies strived to conduct funerals together with the bereaved from dying to disposal (Heessels 2012, 19).

Through a change in the Burial and Cremation Act in 1991 the bereaved were granted permission to take the ashes home, thirty days after the cremation. This waiting period is typical within the Dutch context, giving death ritual a particular structure, and stemmed from a poisonous murder case in the late 19th century (Franke 1989). By keeping the ashes at the funerary ground, it was thought that this could facilitate a forensic investigation when necessary. In contemporary practice this waiting period still exists, but has acquired a different interpretation. It is thought to give the bereaved time to decide on a temporal and final destination for the cremated remains. In 1998 the Act was amended again, allowing people to take the ashes out of the urn to scatter them, and/or divide them into parts. As a result, the market surrounding post-cremation ritualisations prospered. Urns, scatter tubes, objects, jewellery, paintings, and tat-

toos have slowly become popular, and have been promoted and facilitated by entrepreneurs and artists (Heessels et al. 2012).[11]

The development of cremation in the Netherlands thus distinctively altered the structure and meaning of death ritual. The fast process of dissolving the body, the different 'product' in the form of ashes, and options in terms of disposal have influenced ideas about life and death, and have created new places for the living and the dead. The waiting period of thirty days has prolonged the funeral process, demanding – as we will argue – a broader understanding of death ritual itself.

3 Theoretical approaches: Key concepts

This is a study of ritual dynamics as regards the above described developments in Dutch society. Our focus on the ways wherein these developments influence the structure and meaning of death ritual today, implies that we concentrate on ritual performance. We zoom in on death ritual as lived by recently bereaved Dutch people, with a Roman Catholic or Protestant background, or with no religious affiliation. Thereby, two key concepts, and their relationship with each other, take centre stage: ritual practice and ritual meaning. Ritual actions and ritual meanings induce, construct, and reinforce one another (cf. Bell 1992, 30). Behind practices, there can be certain motivations, intentions, or goals, or they may connote the value, purpose, or significance of things (Grimes 2014, 318).

3.1 Ritual practice

From our fieldwork, ritual practice has emerged as a fundamental source with which to study meaning-making in the face of death. By enacting ritual, people respond to the death of a loved one.[12] This evokes the question of what constitutes death ritual in the contemporary Dutch context.

3.1.1 Personalised rites of passage

It is illuminating to look at the genre of 'rites of passage' to emphasise the dynamics of death ritual. In the early 1900s, the French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep pointed to a recurring pattern in life-cycle rituals. He identified a pre-

[11] On the 25th of October 2016, there was a press release (N. 161025c) from the Vatican regarding the disposal of cremated remains, prohibiting Roman Catholics to dispose of the ashes in non-sacred places: http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/25/ 161025c.html

[12] With the normative 'loved one', we aim to underline the close connection between the bereaved and the deceased in this study. For all the people we studied, someone had passed away in their immediate environment. This does not imply that it necessarily was a loving relationship.

liminal, liminal, and postliminal phase, each characterised by typical ritual behaviour. Together, these ritual phases facilitate a symbolic and practical transition through major status passages (Van Gennep 1960, 11). During the first preliminal phase, rites of separation signify the detachment of the deceased and the bereaved from their previous social status and the everyday social structure. The second liminal phase consists of rites of transition, symbolising a threshold as well as a position of ambiguity and paradox. The bereaved and deceased have left their previous status, but have not yet reached their destination. The last postliminal phase is characterised by rites of incorporation (back) into the (new) world, indicating that the ritual subjects have reached their new location or social status.

Rather than being a law, following fixed rules, this threefold pattern can best be understood as a flexible working scheme that provides a processual view on ritual (Deflem 1991, 13; Grimes 2000, 262; Hockey 2002, 213). It helps to grasp the structure and meaning of death ritual, but is also a simplification of reality. Not every ritual passage follows the same course and emphasises the same rites. In fact, funeral rites can be understood as an atypical rather than a classical example of rites of passage:

> The rites of separation are few in number and very simple, while the transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy. Furthermore, those funeral rites which incorporate the deceased into the world of the dead are the most extensively elaborated and assigned the greatest importance (Van Gennep 1960, 146).

Victor Turner granted the transition rites the autonomy Van Gennep referred to, and further elaborated on the tripartite structure via the concepts of liminality and communitas (1967; 1969). During the liminal phase, ritual subjects are "betwixt and between" and essentially released from the immediacy of structure (Turner 1967, 96–97; 1969, 132). A community of comrades occurs, providing individuals with an experience of 'communitas' or shared support. As such, ritual not only protects the social fabric, but also produces it (Bloch & Parry 1982, 6). By focusing on this, Turner drew attention to the social dynamics of change in rites of passage (Hockey 2002, 215). For Turner, the liminal phase is the essential one, as it enables ritual to do the work of transformation, evoking and reinforcing change in social relationships and social location.

In the more classical or traditional sense, as we find it in the work of Van Gennep and the early work of Turner, the concept of rites of passage refers

to *culturally prescribed* rituals. This does not imply that rituals are static, but that they, in one way or another, are understood as transmitted, cultural scripts that are performed by and for the community. Turner (1969, 6), for example, identifies with an observation of Monica Wilson, who argues that people "express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed" (1954, 241).

As a result of the social-cultural developments in the Netherlands, death ritual today is less extensively prescribed and the boundaries of the community have become vague. Although ritual follows a certain script, that script is not obligatory but a matter of personal choice. People are re-inventing ritual practices and have to use their own resources to deal with the difficult transition of losing a loved one. People are thus creating *personalised rites of passage* through various symbolic acts.[13] They create different concepts of self, of social belonging and status, and of the deceased. Furthermore, as we will illustrate, they have constructed very individual, though not asocial, incorporation practices of prolonging and breaking relationships with the dead.[14]

3.1.2 Death ritual as a protracted process

The individualisation of rites of passage highly influences the conceptualisation of death ritual in this study. Death ritual is a term that includes a variety of pre-death and post-death practices. Although it is a broader term than funeral, it is often – particularly in funeral parlance and practice – used to indicate the performance of the funeral ceremony (Grimes 2000, 234). In Dutch society, the ceremony is commonly seen as 'the prominent' and 'the last' rite.[15] Largely, this has been stimulated by undertaking businesses, centralising the organisation and the performance of the ceremony. As far as professionals are involved, the

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[13] The individualisation of rites of passage has been part of Turner's later work, where he introduces the term liminoid to question liminality in modern societies. Liminal-like phenomena are not only found in other fields of society, such as leisure, but the term also points to the individualisation of liminality itself: "In the so called 'high culture' of complex societies, liminoid is not only removed from a rites of passage context, it is also individualized" (1982, 32–45). Although we will not further use the term liminoid, its implication for the individualisation of rites of passage is central to this study.

[14] I owe much gratitude to Yvon van der Pijl for commenting on the notion of personalised rites of passage by reviewing chapter six on transforming bonds.

[15] Whether the funeral is seen as the most prominent rite also depends on the cultural and religious background of the deceased and the bereaved, as well as on the migration context. Among some Muslims in the Netherlands, it is common for the burial rites to take place in the country of origin, making the ritual washing of the deceased the most prominent rite in the Dutch context (see Venhorst 2013). For the group we studied, however, emphasis is placed on the funeral ceremony.

funeral is, indeed, the last rite in many an instance. However, as the living and the dead have not yet reached their final destination, it is not the final word of death ritual.

The contemporary notion of the funeral as the main 'death-event' overlooks the importance of – most notably – individualised incorporation rites.[16] It fails to understand death as a protracted social phenomenon, to which people continuously attach practices, beliefs, and emotions (Hertz 1907/ 1960). Death ritual is not restricted to ritual performances with regards to an audience or the social community, but also includes ritual enactments in more private circumstances. Therefore, the ties between the deceased and the bereaved are a fundamental aspect of exploring people's dynamic movement through ritual phases, as well as the transitional nature of the process of death ritual in general. When Van Gennep focused on the tripartite pattern of ritual, Hertz described the passage of death in terms of the relationships between the soul of the deceased, the corpse, and the period of mourning among the living. Rites of separation, transition, and reintegration affect these relationships, whereby incorporation might occur "when the representation of the deceased has required a final and pacified character in the consciousness of survivors" (Hertz 1907/ 1960, 82). Becoming dead thus takes time, and is not a matter of six working days and a funeral.

Drawing attention to these contemporary dynamics of death ritual, this study will argue that death ritual can be understood as a "protracted process of accumulative rites that takes the living through various [phases of separation, transition and incorporation], according to the way[s] the living perceive the condition of the deceased" (Suzuki 2000, 18). At particular instances in the process of death ritual, particular beliefs emerge in relation to the ritual practices and the status of the living and the dead. "Context", thus, not only refers to developments within the larger social and cultural context, but also to the ritual context, being situated in the process of rites of passage.

3.1.3 Ritual re-invention and re-imagination

Because ritual is always situated in a particular context, it is constructed and subject to negotiation. For rites to work in contemporary Dutch society, they must be re-invented and re-imagined in view of those involved (Grimes 2000, 4). To explore ritual re-invention in view of changing circumstances, it is useful to define the terminology used in this book. To describe ritual dynamics, we fol-

[16] It also largely ignores the separation rites during the process of dying, both biologically and symbolically.

low the distinction of Ronald Grimes between rite, ritual, ritualising, and ritualisation (1990, 7–8; cf. Gluckman 1962, 49–50).

Rite is used to refer to specific ritual enactments in specific times and places. A rite is thus a specific instance of ritual, widely recognised by members of a culture or a group, and distinguished by these members from ordinary behaviour (Grimes 1990, 7). Claiming that a rite is recognised by a group of people, does not imply that rites can't be individualised. Rather, it means that there is no such thing as an asocial rite, as humans are social beings. Thus, what is considered to be a rite is socially determined, changes over time, and depends on who decides.[17] Moreover, a rite does not embody a sovereign position, but is part of a larger ritual system or tradition that includes other rites (cf. Turner 1973). In our study, the larger ritual system of which rites are part is coined death ritual.

Ritual thus refers to the whole system of rites and the general idea of such a system, of which a rite is a specific instance. Ritual is commonly something that is described and theorised upon by scholars (Grimes 2014, 186), which has resulted in an inexhaustible number of definitions, whereas rites and rituals are things that people enact. Our understanding of ritual, following Grimes, as "a set of actions embodying espoused values enacted in prescribed and extraordinary ways" (2014, appendix I), facilitates our emphasis on ritual practice and ritual meaning in the face of death, as it creates space for ritual dynamics. Prescribed in this sense does not refer to the obligatory character of ritual, but merely to the existence of a framework in which ritual practices take place.

Enacted rituals follow specific guidelines, but are also "[children] of the imagination" (Grimes 2000, 4). They are adjusted, remodelled, and re-imagined in view of particular circumstances, preferences, and ideas. Ritualising is the act of deliberately constructing, cultivating, or inventing rites, or increasing the degree to which an activity is ritualised. It is an active process wherein something emerges, often in the margins or on thresholds, involving reflection and criticism (Grimes 1990, 8; 2014, 343). Before, during, and after a rite is performed, re-imagination and re-invention take place, verbally articulated and/or enacted in ritual itself. Rites are never invented, but always re-invented, as we remodel rites on the basis of ideas and materials at hand (cf. Turner 1973, 1100). Fur-

[17] Although the term rite refers to something that people enact, it is used as an analytical term in this study. During our fieldwork, terms like rite and ritual were rarely used by people themselves. Rather they spoke of the funeral, the cremation or burial, the grave, the ash disposal, and so on.

thermore, such re-invention cannot take place without re-imagination or "ritual fantasy" (Grimes 2000, 111): we re-invent rites based on the depths of our imagination and fantasy, not only on the basis of our memories – for example, of earlier rites in which we participated. In addition to imagining about ritual, we also imagine with it. Ritual is a means to make sense of cosmological leaps (Grimes 2000, 60).

Ritualisation, lastly, refers to activities that are not normally viewed as ritual, but that are treated metaphorically, often by the researcher or observer, as if they potentially are (Grimes 1990, 8; 2014, 343). This, for example, may apply to certain patterns in daily life, like forms of interaction, housework, or one's routine to get ready in the morning.

3.2 Ritual meaning

Although ritual is not necessarily meaningful in itself (Staal 1979), we have seen that its enactment aspires to be (Grimes 1990, 35). Ritual evokes an active meaning-making process among those involved. The bereaved seek and create meaning by making particular choices in view of the ritual performance and by enacting ritual elements, and in turn take meaning from the preparation and performance (Holloway et al. 2013; Neimeyer 2001). If successful, this results in recognisable rites which help to make sense of life and death beyond the ritual performance itself. The question of how meanings emerge, are reinforced, and re-imagined in the protracted process of death ritual is central to this study.

In view of our focus on death, religion, individualisation, and cremation, we are particularly interested in those aspects of meaning that concern beliefs (Park 2013, 40).[18] In the last decade, belief has become a much-contested topic, particularly in anthropology. The term itself is commonly seen as "conceptually misleading and ideologically dubious" (Coleman & Lindquist 2008, 2). It is often unclear what belief is, how the concept is used, and how it relates to the particular context wherein it is used or drawn from (Carlisle & Simon 2012, 221). The usage of the term belief, therefore, not only reflects the context

[18] In her meaning-making model, Park not only identifies beliefs, but also goals, towards which one is motivated – for example, reaching an old age – and a sense of purpose, or values – such as health and quality of life. The boundaries between goals, values, and beliefs are of course not as firm as the distinction between them suggests. Goals are affected by values, so as one loses his or her health, different goals might emerge. Furthermore, Davies (2015, 362) has suggested that values are closely related to beliefs. A value, such as health, can become a belief when one is not only committed to it, but when that value becomes part of one's individual identity, or the identity of the group. Beliefs thus can be 'secular', 'spiritual', or 'religious'. See also Ruel (2005).

of the scholar, but also influences the conclusions about beliefs any scholar presents (Day 2010, 10). For all these reasons, it is important to be clear about the way we use this term.

The verb 'believe' has a strong Christian connotation in the Dutch context. Asking interviewees to elaborate upon their 'beliefs' easily frames the answer to official, prescribed belief statements, commonly involving a binary opposition between religion and non-religion. As our interest lies not with prescriptions or universal descriptions, but with lived religion (McGuire 2008), and the ways in which people enact and reflect upon beliefs, we adapt a performative understanding of belief (Day 2011). We do not focus on the way in which our subjects use the term, and during our interviews we rarely introduced the term ourselves. Rather, we aim to stress the social location of belief (Day & Coleman 2010, 6). How do context and ritual practice influence social, spatial, and temporal expressions and enactments of belief, and vice versa?

3.2.1 Situational belief

In this study, we understand beliefs to be situational. The term situational belief refers to those beliefs that are induced and reinforced by practices in particular situations. In funerary and bereavement practices – influenced by changing circumstances – beliefs are shaped by the bereaved in view of the particular situation at hand. Although beliefs are necessarily framed by the larger social and cultural context in which they occur, it is only in the movement of action itself, for example, in creating narratives or in ritualising, that they acquire a particular meaning to the person(s) involved. Situational beliefs are thus always contextual, lived, and dynamic (McGuire 2008). Therefore, it is particularly through situational beliefs, as well as the accompanying ritual practices, that we can increase our understanding of the diverse ways in which bereaved people in the Netherlands, with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background, give meaning to the loss of their deceased in the prolonged process of death ritual.

Speaking about situational belief, we must look at the work of Martin Stringer. In his 1996 article *Towards a situational theory of belief*, he has drawn attention to the fact that "particular beliefs [are] stated as facts and introduced into specific conversations for specific purposes" (218). The empirical truth of these belief statements is irrelevant, in the sense that it is taken for granted. Rightfully, he illustrates that people use belief statements that make sense in the situation at hand, that 'work' (cf. McGuire 2008, 15). Whether popular or offi-

cial, they are efficiently used when needed, for example, to cope with a particular problem, and otherwise dismissed. Above all, for Stringer, these statements are not connected in an all-encompassing system of belief (2008, 51).

Stringer's emphasis on the importance of the particular situation or context is fundamental for our conceptualisation of situational belief, and has inspired us to study how particular beliefs occur in particular situations in the protracted process of death ritual. To grasp situational belief, however, we argue that one must look beyond verbal articulations of situational beliefs (cf. Day 2010). Drawing strongly on the works of Pouillon, Southwold, and Sperber (2008, 42–44), Stringer particularly zooms in on the articulation of belief, consisting of a series of specific statements, rather than the practices involved. More attention must be given to the fact that people not only state but also enact beliefs. To enact beliefs – and upon beliefs – has a strong resemblance to the question of truth of Stringer's belief statements: to enact it does mean its truth is taken for granted in the particular situation involved, whereas it does not mean it is held to be true when reflecting upon the enacted belief in a later situation. Still, practices influence people's (verbal articulation of) beliefs, and the situational aspect thus inherently has a practical component. It implies that beliefs are lived. The relationship between acts in particular situations and the ways wherein they shape or induce beliefs that occur in, or as a result of, those situations, must be further explored.

In this study, afterlife beliefs take a central position. We will look at statements of recently bereaved people regarding life after death, as well as at practices that involve a notion of continued existence beyond death. To do so, we will focus on the positional, exegetical, and operational expression of temporal, spatial, and social aspects of afterlife beliefs in people's narratives (Turner 1973, 1103). As such, we are first interested in the relationship between verbally expressed afterlife beliefs and Christian tradition. Second, we will study the way in which afterlife beliefs are formed and enacted upon through practices with objects in concrete spaces, where particular attention will be given to social post-mortem relationships. Herein, the concepts of symbolic immortality and continuing bonds take a central role.

3.2.2 Symbolic immortality

To examine lived expressions of the hereafter in relation to Christian tradition, we will focus on the concept of *symbolic immortality*, as described by Robert Jay Lifton and Eric Olson (1974; 2004). At the basis of this concept lies the ob-

servation that people create concepts, images, and symbols that transcend the individual self, allowing them to participate in the continuity of life, without denying the reality of death (Lifton & Olson 2004, 33–39). People create cultural forms through which the dead are kept alive in their "hearts, minds and memories" (Chidester 2002, 16). In describing meaning-making through symbolic immortality, Lifton and Olson build further upon the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. As such, they particularly stress the "human need for a sense of historical connection beyond individual life" (1974, 75), and they differentiate between the actual existence of an afterlife and the processes of symbolisation in response to mortality, focusing on the latter. Thus, by observing meaning-making practices of people rather than questioning the reality of the images that occur, and by viewing religious symbols as one of multiple ways to express the regeneration of life, this concept creates a framework to study lived afterlife beliefs in a context of individualisation and secularisation.

Lifton and Olson describe five categories or modes through which a sense of symbolic immortality can be expressed. First, the deceased's life continues through offspring, creating a sense of generational or biological continuity. This *biological mode* does not limit itself to offspring alone, but gets intermingled with social continuity, resulting in biosocial immortality, which includes other social groups, varying from friends and acquaintances to nations and peoples. In his work on patterns of transcendence, David Chidester (2002, 12–14) points towards the reciprocity of biological or "ancestral" immortality. People may live on through progeny on the one hand, while the survivors, on the other hand, keep their deceased alive through ritual and social practice.

Second, the persistence of life is expressed by the *creative mode.* During life, people can have an on-going influence on others by making "contributions of lasting value" (Lifton & Olson 1974, 78). Herein, Lifton and Olson particularly note the importance of works. Through acts like teaching, inventing, and writing – and the products resulting from these acts – people create a posthumous influence on other human beings. In addition, we would like to introduce the *material mode*, emphasising the importance of objects. Objects of the dead, whether the product of the deceased's own work or otherwise associated with him or her, have the capacity to provide a continuum beyond the life span.

Third, they describe a *theological mode* of immortality. Their theological notion of immortality is strongly related to the idea of spiritual rebirth. One dies "to a profane or vulgar existence" and life is regenerated "on a more intense and meaningful plane", connecting the individual with the principle of

eternity (Lifton & Olson 1974, 80). It is here that religious images appeal, often but not solely, in relation to another realm of existence (Chidester 2002, 18–19). Being occupied with lived religion and the transforming role of religion in society, this mode is of particular interest to our research, and it will be elaborated upon extensively in chapter five.

Fourth, the *natural mode* of immortality is described, rooted in the ongoing rhythms of nature and the idea that earth will continue to exist after we ourselves are gone. This mode is not only a category of symbolic immortality, but also provides a solid basis for the existence of other forms of symbolic immortality. The meaning of immortality in an individual sense strongly depends on the fate of humankind and the world: "Our conviction that things matter is sustained by our confidence that life will go on after we ourselves are gone" (Scheffler 2013, 81).

The last category that is depicted, *experiential transcendence*, lies at the roots of the other four modes of symbolic immortality as well, and is different from the others in that it refers to a psychological state. It refers to the experience of being beyond the limits of the self, of time, of place, and of death. This 'moving beyond' can occur in various ways. It is found in accepting death, in techniques of ecstasy, like trances and healings, and through visionary journeys to the afterworld (Chidester 2002). Furthermore, it has a strong similarity with the notion of liminality, and the need to bridge the social and temporal void that is created by death (Turner 1967). In all instances, the ability to transcend is a necessary condition. For Lifton and Olson, it is this ability that lies at the very heart of symbolic immortality, evoking a reordering of images by which people give meaning to their lives. Thus, in the process of symbolising immortality, experiential transcendence is expressed through, and necessary for, biological, creative, theological, and natural images, and, as this study will illustrate, through material objects as well.

People are creating images of symbolic immortality throughout their lives (cf. Wojtkowiak 2011). This mostly occurs unconsciously, but can elevate into a conscious effort at times of transition and crisis (Lifton & Olson 1974, 38). As such, the preservation of a person's identity becomes particularly urgent when threatened by the disruptive nature of death (Unruh 1983). When a person passes away, notions of immortality become a situational force against a particular death itself, in addition to a more general 'human response' to mortality (Davies 2015, 24). Therefore, images of symbolic immortality depend on the status of the deceased and the bereaved at a specific moment in time (Hertz

1907/1960; cf. Stringer 1996), and are imbedded and constructed in the prolonged series of mortuary rituals (Suzuki 2000, 18).

3.3.3 Continuing Bonds

Whereas the notion of symbolic immortality illustrates the diverse ways in which people articulate and construct continuity in the face of death, we must look further at the ways in which people enact it. This comes most strongly to the fore in post-mortem relationships, where the dead are given a temporal, spatial, and social location. We aim to draw attention to the dynamics of ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, by illustrating how situational beliefs of continued existence are implicitly present in practices. Furthermore, we will show that such ongoing relationships are ritualised and become part of the prolonged process of death ritual. By doing so we are not only able to explore individualised incorporation practices, but we also contribute to the academic debate on continuing bonds. Indeed, the dynamic ongoing relationships between the living and the dead can be viewed as enacted situational beliefs that evoke notions of symbolic immortality. The diverse modes of symbolic immortality can thus be enacted. However, as we aim to emphasise post-mortem relationships, and contribute to ongoing debates regarding such relationships, we will study the integration practices of the recently bereaved from the perspective of continuing bonds. It is to this concept, and its development in academia, that we now will turn.

Relationships between the living and the dead have been the subject of scholarly conversation throughout the 20th century. During this period most academic, professional, and religious discourses in the West stressed stark and solid boundaries between the living and the dead (Howarth 2000). In this 'breaking bonds' or 'severing ties' discourse, detachment from death and the dead was prioritised, resulting in the social and spatial sequestration of death, as well as in pathological descriptions of bereavement (Gorer 1956, 56–62; Hockey, Komaromy & Woodthorpe 2010, 10). Grounded in a modernist and positivist paradigm, both the context and lived experiences of the bereaved were commonly neglected in favour of universal models that aimed at resolving grief (Valentine 2006). Informed by selective readings of theorists, such as Freud (1955), Bowlby (1961; 1969–1980), Parkes (1972), and Kübler-Ross (1970), grief often became prescribed as a sequence of stages through which each individual *must* pass to recover from its 'maladaptive' situation (Stroebe 2002). Although the dead were not to be forgotten or dismissed altogether, they were

to acquire a place in the past, in memory, and were not to fulfil an active role in the future lives of the bereaved (Stroebe & Schut 2005; Howarth 2000; Rosenblatt 1996). Numerous scholars have shown how this has resulted in the marginalisation of on-going relationships between the living the dead. From the 1990s onwards, another academic discourse started to prevail, one aiming to illustrate that relationships "with the dead could be normal rather than pathological" and did not have to end (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1996; Klass 2006). Grief was humanised and socialised, and Western ways of death were revisited (Valentine 2006). 'Continuing bonds' became a dominant paradigm in many disciplines, and bereavement came to be understood as an on-going process of accommodation, whereby people seek a sense of meaning in the face of losing their loved one (Arnarson 2013).

The diverse and multifaceted on-going relationships between the living and the dead have been studied elaborately since. The process of self-narrative has been brought to the fore, through which continuous relationships are established wherein people develop and preserve the deceased's personhood, and wherein they find new biographies for themselves and for their dead (Walter 1996; Howarth 2000; Marwit & Klass 1994–1995; Valentine 2008). Also, several studies have illustrated experiences of continuing bonds at home, where the deceased is made present in various ways. Attention has been drawn, for example, to material representations of the deceased's post-self, surrounding home memorials in the Netherlands (Wojtkowiak & Venbrux 2009). At such memorials the identity of the deceased is materialised and integrated into the lives of the bereaved through objects that symbolise or belong(ed) to him or her. Furthermore, it has been illustrated how everyday and mundane objects of the dead play a role beyond such domestic memorials (Gibson 2008). The interaction with objects that mediate and signify the presence of their deceased shows that, regardless of religious affiliation, people are strongly attached to material legacies of the deceased (Gibson 2004). Such material legacies then become part of an economy of memory and relationships (Miller & Parrot 2009). This occurs not only in private settings, but also in public institutional and informal spaces, where bonds become visible at cemeteries and surroundings through a variety of memorials. Letters, flowers, cards, and balloons, as well as the use of the present tense, may evoke and materialise a continued presence of the dead (Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2005; Maddrell 2013). A similar power lies within cremated remains (Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012). In all these multifarious instances, it is important to note that the experience of an ongoing bond cannot

always be controlled, but can be induced by symbols, sounds, and traces of shared experiences from the past (Hallam, Hockey & Howarth 1999).

Although the framework of continuing bonds aims to address the diversity and dynamics of *continuity*, and succeeds in doing so in many an instance (Miller 2008; Miller & Parrot 2009), one should ask whether continuity has become the new norm, and if so, whether it has created a blind spot (Klass 2006; Root & Exline 2014). In drawing attention to the visible, present bonds with the dead, one loses sight of those bonds that are lacking, invisible, or which feature a sense of discontinuity. The dominance of the concept of continuing bonds, as well as its normativity, is now slowly becoming visible. Attention has been given, for instance, to the lack of prolonged post-mortem social existence (Jonsson 2015). Also, it has been stressed that one should remember that mourning is about dealing with life without the deceased, and not only with him or her (Souza 2016). The presence of the dead is first and foremost evoked by their absence (Hallam & Hockey 2001; Maddrell 2013).

By focusing on either continuing bonds or breaking bonds – one of which often implies writing against the other – one can easily overlook the subtleties of both, as well as the nuances in-between. We argue that the dynamic relationships between the living and the dead can be more accurately understood if one looks at the interplay of continuing and breaking bonds, of absence and presence, of distance and proximity, in the experiences of the bereaved (cf. Miller & Parrot 2009). Therefore, attention should be drawn to negotiations of the bereaved with the absence–presence of their dead (Maddrell 2013). This, we suggest, not simply points to breaking or continuing bonds, but to transforming bonds, whereby both the relationship as well as the social locations of the bereaved and the deceased are altered. The bereaved incorporate the deceased in their everyday lives and ritualise their reciprocal relationship to find a new balance of absence–presence. Thus, to highlight its dynamics, and to provide a ritual perspective on ongoing relationships, we will situate continuing bonds in our notion of death ritual as a protractive process of accumulative rites. Transition does not occur in one single rite, but in a series of rites, including those rites in which other deceased stand central (cf. Venbrux 1995), and the performance of transforming bonds illustrates how this process extends beyond the funeral into the everyday lives of the bereaved.

4 Research questions and research aim

The key concepts that we have described shape our study on the structure and meaning of death ritual in the dynamic context of the Netherlands. Within the protracted process of death ritual, we will draw attention to the ways wherein recently bereaved Dutch, from a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background, ritualise and give meaning to death.

4.1 Research questions

This leads to our primary research question:

> In response to a death, what situational beliefs emerge in the funerary and bereavement practices of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the Netherlands?

In this study we will examine the situational beliefs that emerge in the protracted process of death ritual. Three phases of the process of death ritual will be emphasised. First, we will focus on the preparation and performance of the funeral ceremony (chapters 2 and 3). Second, we will draw attention to disposal practices, which are understood to be part of the funerary practices but also create a bridge to the period beyond the funeral (chapter 4). Third, we will look at the period of bereavement up to a year after the funeral ceremony (chapters 5 and 6). For the sake of clarity and the structure of this book, and in view of the debate regarding continuing bonds, we situate the period of bereavement after the funeral ceremony. It must be noted, however, that grief, mourning, and bereavement commonly occur before bodily disposal, or even before biological death.[19]

Regarding disposal, we confine ourselves to cremation practices for various reasons. First, it is particularly due to the rise and development of modern cremation that the circumstances of death ritual have been altered. It has

[19] Whereas in Dutch we only find one term in relation to the process of loss, namely *rouw,* in English three terms are distinguished, all with different connotations. Bereavement is used to refer to the state or condition of having lost someone (Attig 1996, 8; Walter 1999, xv). The terms grief and mourning are defined in various and ambiguous ways in academic literature. Grief can be used to refer to a specific emotion, in contrast to mourning as a cultural behaviour (Walter 1999, xv). However, this distinction has come to be understood as too neat, since mourning and grief are both physically and culturally embodied and do not exist without context. Today, grieving and mourning commonly refer to the process of accommodation to loss (Neimeyer 2001, 38). Following the work of Attig (1996, 8–9), we use mourning to refer to what we ourselves do in order to transform our relationship with the one who has died, as well as to the ways our society tells us to behave in response, including prescribed ritual practices. Grieving is used in the same way, but can also refer to other loss experiences, like divorce or when one loses a job.

prolonged the ritual process, and has influenced meaning-making practices in the face of death. Second, data from our observations and interviews have pointed to the dominant role of cremated remains in mediating ongoing relationships between the living and the dead. Third, our survey results have shown some unexpected results regarding attitudes towards cremated remains, prompting us to deepen this aspect of our study.

In view of the changing role of religion, we focus on the impact and meaning of secularisation in the face of death. Since research has shown that active churchgoing in the Netherlands has strongly declined in moderate Christian churches (Vermeer, Janssen & De Hart 2011, 389), we have chosen to confine ourselves to 'moderate' Christendom and non-religion, as well as the fuzzy categories in between. In our interviews and survey, we have thus selected Dutch bereaved with a Roman Catholic, Protestant (Protestant Church in the Netherlands), or religiously unaffiliated background.[20] Our focus on the bereaved implies that we also draw attention to their relationships with the deceased and with ritual experts. Regarding terminology, a short comment must be made on indicating our ritual participants as "the bereaved", "the survivors", "the dearest and nearest", or "the immediate family". These terms are all used to refer to the same group of people: namely those people who were closely related to the deceased, either by kinship or social relationship, and who were enacting the funerary rites.

The concepts of ritual practice and ritual meaning form the keystones of the research questions in the chapters of this book, and the chapters trail the process of death ritual. In the first three chapters, the funeral and disposal practices will be emphasised:

> What ritual actions can be observed in the preparation and the performance of funerals of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors, and what ritual actors play a role in this process? (ritual practice)
>
> What ritual actions are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the preparation and the performance of the funeral? (ritual meaning)
>
> What cremation and disposal practices are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the process of death ritual? (ritual practice, ritual meaning)

[20] It must be noted that shifting circumstances also influence the ritual repertoires of people from other cultural and religious backgrounds, and that the emergence of different religious and cultural groups influences ritual repertoires in the Netherlands (Venhorst 2013; Van der Pijl 2016).

In chapters four and five we will focus on articulations and performances of belief among Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the period of bereavement:

> What notions of symbolic immortality can be found in attitudes and narratives of the recently bereaved?
>
> Are the relationships between the living and the dead ritualised after the funeral ceremony, and if so, in what ways?

4.2 Research aim

This research has a threefold aim. It aspires to gain insight into the funeral, disposal, and bereavement practices of recently bereaved Dutch in view of changing circumstances in Dutch society, predominantly, the changing role of religion, the rise of cremation, and the process of individualisation. What do these processes imply for the structure and meaning of death ritual? Furthermore, it aims to contribute to theory on the individualisation of death ritual, by drawing attention to the protracted aspects of death ritual within the contemporary Dutch context. Lastly, it aims to give some insight into the neglected ritual aspects of continuing bonds, and, as such, aspires to contribute to the multidisciplinary theoretical discourse on continuing bonds.

5 Research methods

In order to study the emerging situational beliefs in funeral, disposal, and bereavement practices, we need to gain insight into various aspects of meaning-making in the face of death. Not only do we have to study attitudes, practices, and beliefs, but we are also working within the highly multidisciplinary fields of death studies, ritual studies, and religious studies. Based on our confirmatory and exploratory research questions, involving attitudes, vocabularies, and practices, our study has followed a sequential three-phase mixed method design, whereby it has integrated both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods (qual → quan → qual). Before discussing the three phases of data collection, however, we would like to address some issues regarding the 'mixing' of methods, methodologies, and disciplines (Archibald et al. 2015), and draw attention to the importance and challenges of mixed methods research in the field of research to which this study aims to contribute.

5.1 Mixed methods research

In this study, we define mixed methods research as a type of inquiry in which "qualitative and quantitative approaches are *combined* or *integrated* in some way" (Poth & Onwuegbuzie 2015, 1), "for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (Johnson et al. 2007, 123). Mixed methods research has become an increasingly popular approach and debated topic in several fields of study over the last two decades, with both its advocates and opponents. Although different paradigmatic stances exist regarding whether, when, and how qualitative and quantitative approaches can be combined (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009, 83–105; Greene 2008, 12), the rationale to use such an approach lies in the view that every approach to study a phenomenon is partial. Therefore, the combination or integration of different approaches may contribute to grasp the multifaceted and complex characteristics of social phenomena (Greene 2008, 14). As such, mixed methods approaches are apt to be used in the field of death studies, ritual studies, and religious studies.

Although mixed methods research has great value for this study and the field in which it is situated, some crucial questions have been raised in terms of combining methods, methodology, and disciplines (Archibald et al. 2015). Regarding methods, first there is the question of what 'mixing' means. What is being mixed, when is it being mixed, and what is the relationship between the mixed components (Creswell 2015)? In this study, 'mixing' refers to the combination and integration of two qualitative approaches and one quantitative approach to answer the diverse aspects of the overarching research question. Integration took place in view of the development of instruments: the survey and the participant observation guides (for the final research phase). A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches occurred in the data interpretation stage. Thereby, the qualitative and quantitative results complemented each other, and were used as multiple lenses to interpret and compare the data. The overall result is a cyclical research model, characterised by constant iteration and triangulation (see figure 1.1).[21]

Second, we can observe ongoing debates in the field of mixed methods research regarding methodology and paradigmatic assumptions. These debates do not question whether the use of several perspectives to study a phenomenon

[21] Although triangulation clarifies and enriches the understanding of social phenomena by using different perspectives, either through the use of several methods or researchers, it traditionally refers to a multi-method approach within qualitative research (Flick 2007). Thus, an important difference with mixed methods research is the absence of a paradigm shift in terms of methodology.

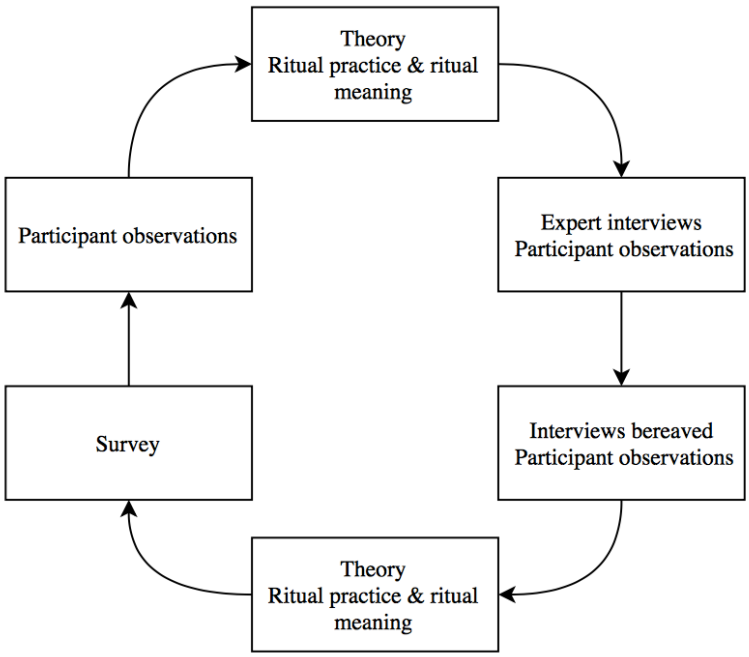

FIGURE 1.1 RESEARCH STEPS OF THIS STUDY USING A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

is helpful, but demonstrate an ongoing struggle to define mixed methods research, its paradigm(s), and its benefits (Denzin 2012).[22] Rather than starting from any paradigm, however, the use of methods has followed the research questions and different methods have served to answer different questions (Grimes 2014, 172).

Lastly, in addition to the existence of different methods and methodologies, there is the question of different disciplines. Methods and concepts are used differently across fields of research, a challenge with which many a scholar is familiar. In the field of religious studies, for instance, no univocal paradigm exists on how to conduct an ethnography, an interview, or a survey. Rather, methods are borrowed, translated, and adjusted from other fields of research with a stronger disciplinary methodological tradition, such as anthropology,sociology, and psychology. The same is true for many concepts used in this study, such as rites of passage, situational belief, continuing bonds, and symbolic immortality. Thus, not only the question of how to mix methods, but the

[22] It is not the aim of this study to analyse the different stances and different paradigms. In relation to mixed methods research, detailed overviews regarding these debates can be found in the works of Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, 88) and Lincoln and Guba (2005, 198–199).

question of what constitutes a method or a concept, is continuously open to debate.

5.2 Mixed methods in death, ritual, and religious studies

Although not neglecting the complexities of these methodological debates, we argue that the use of mixed methods is urgent and, moreover, can lead to fruitful results and co-operation in the fields of death, ritual, and religious studies. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, different questions are raised, leading to the rethinking of phenomena. Different approaches have the capability to reveal the blind spots of particular methods, or of a particular (methodological or disciplinary) perspective on a research problem. As such, the combination of different methods strengthens and enriches the inquiry, as well as the results.

Furthermore, it is exactly the multidisciplinary character of 'our' field of research that makes a mixed methods approach valuable. Not only can such an approach shed light on various perspectives in the study of death, ritual, and religion, it also has the potential to create more coherence in the field. In death studies, for example, two main research traditions exist (cf. Visser 2016). In quantitative approaches, whose scholars mostly publish in the journal *Death Studies*, we find a strong emphasis on psychological research. And in qualitative approaches, whose scholars mainly publish in *Mortality*, we find a combination of anthropological, ritual, sociological, religious studies, historical, and, to a small extent, psychological research. In practice, this has resulted in different groups of researchers studying similar topics from different angles. Such an example is the topic of grief, mourning, and bereavement, which we will come to talk about extensively. We find more clinical, psychological studies on the one hand, and a social-cultural approach on the other. This, in itself, is not a problem; in fact, it is an enrichment. However, little communication, co-operation, and synthesis of results exists (cf. Visser 2016).[23] We are not arguing that every scholar should work with mixed methods research, but an understanding of both qualitative and quantitative studies and approaches, and their strengths and weaknesses, can bridge the gap between several traditions which have a shared interest in inquiry into death.

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[23] This clearly comes to the fore in the bibliographies of journal articles, for example, in *Death Studies* versus *Mortality*.

5.3 Three-phased sequential design

The three-phased sequential mixed methods design of this study (Greene 2008; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004) has been driven by our confirmatory and exploratory research questions. In each chapter we are interested in people's attitudes, vocabularies, and enactments in relation to ritual practices and ritual beliefs.

During the first qualitative phase the research had an inductive, open-ended, and exploratory character. We conducted interviews with ritual experts (n=20) and the recently bereaved (n=15), combining these with (participant) observations in a funeral home (two periods of three months). The two rounds of (participant) observations were conducted concurrently with the two rounds of interviewing. In view of our research question, we selected people and cases with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background. The interviews and observations followed a specific guide (Heldens & Reysoo 2005; Grimes 2014) that was altered for each case and readjusted based on the earlier interviews and observations (appendices A & B). As such, there was a constant process of iteration between the field, the evaluation and interpretation of data, and the analysis.

Following and grounded upon the qualitative fieldwork, a survey was developed and conducted among recently bereaved Dutch people (n=198). In the questionnaire we gave particular attention to the language of the interviewees, in order to formulate the items as close to common speech as possible. The response options of most items in the questionnaire were also grounded in the fieldwork, as well as based on surveys conducted earlier (Wojtkowiak, Rutjens & Venbrux 2010; Quartier 2011). The results of our survey research were analysed and then combined with insights from our qualitative data. The quantitative associations, i.e., the relationship between people's agreement with particular items and some personal and funeral characteristics, provided us with additional directions from which to interpret our qualitative material.

Lastly, the results from our quantitative and qualitative data collection raised some further questions, for example, in relation to cremated remains. The quantitative results illuminated blind spots in our fieldwork, provided context for our qualitative results, and yielded fresh perspectives from which we could revisit our qualitative material. It also brought us back to the field for final participant observations in a funeral home and a crematorium (total of two weeks).

5.3.1 Interviews and (participant) observations

Between 2012 and 2014 the initial qualitative data were collected. Taking an inductive approach, this part of data collection was strongly led by the people we interviewed, their actions, and the topics that they emphasised in their narratives. Although we were mainly interested in the perspectives of the bereaved themselves, at the beginning of the study we did not have full access to the field, and not enough knowledge of the funeral process and the complexities involved. We therefore started the process by interviewing ritual experts (n=20) and conducting participant observations, over a three-month period, in and surrounding a funeral home. The people in the funeral home were very interested in the emerging group of "ritual coaches" – in other contexts also referred to as ritual guides, (civil) celebrants, or (independent) funeral speakers – and were therefore happy to have us around to interview the people they worked with on a regular basis. As a result, we were able to conduct interviews with traditional ritual experts: pastors from a Roman Catholic (n=4) and Protestant (Protestant Church in the Netherlands) background (n=4), as well as funeral directors (n=2), and the emerging group of ritual experts, the ritual coaches (n=10) (appendix E). The occurrence of new ritual experts is itself a phenomenon closely linked to the changing role of religion and individualisation, and the social-cultural circumstances of Dutch society in relation to death ritual naturally became the main topic of the interviews. What constituted a good funeral according to the experts? What was the role of religion? And of the bereaved and deceased? How did they view their position in the field, in relation to other experts and the highly professionalised funeral industry? We held interviews with 9 females and 11 males, between the ages of 38 and 79. Most of the interviews took place at the homes of the ritual experts, and on average lasted 1.5–2 hours. In one instance, we held the interview at a coffee shop, and on two occasions we conducted the interviews by phone. The interviews have been transcribed, coded, and analysed by the interviewer.

Alongside these expert-interviews, which allowed us to gain some insight into the field and the changing circumstances of Dutch society in relation to death, we also conducted participant observations. We were invited to accompany professionals – pastors, ritual coaches, funeral professionals – and, as such, were able to participate in and observe most aspects of organising the funeral: the preparation interviews between funeral directors and families, arrangement interviews with ritual experts regarding the content of the ceremony, acts surrounding the deceased in the morgue as well as the mourning or viewing

room (chapel of rest), wakes, talks with the hearse drivers, the funeral ceremony itself, and finally the actual cremation or burial. With two families, we were involved in every step along the way but, as one can imagine, this was not always possible, mostly due to matters of time and, of course, to the delicate and private nature of the events taking place. The value of these observations cannot be overestimated. Not only did we obtain a sense of the culture of the Dutch funeral industry and the sensibilities involved, but we were also able to observe what happened backstage (Goffman 1959/1971), leading to the important questions: what is discussed behind the scenes, when there is little or no audience involved, and what does this reveal about ritual practice and ritual meaning?

These participant observations raise another aspect of this type of fieldwork that must be addressed, namely, its ethics. When conducting interviews with ritual experts and the bereaved, ethics did not pose much of a problem. We explained the procedures, discussed informed consent before the interview, and again revisited the consent topic afterwards. The interviewees were given the opportunity to give consent in writing if they wished to do so. They were also given the possibility of withdrawing from the interview and the research project at any time, and were allowed to stop the audio tape for a moment, or stop the recording in general. For the participant observations, however, things were not that easy. Can you ask a family that has lost a loved one only a few hours previously, whether a researcher is allowed to participate in the funeral arrangements? Should you even let a stranger be part of such a moment? Is it acceptable to obscure your true nature as a researcher? There were many more such difficult questions. All we can do is explain how we managed this complex situation together with the funeral professionals.

When a death had occurred and the family contacted the funeral company, the coordinator would ask the family whether it was acceptable if someone – often referred to as an intern who had to learn about funerals – walked alongside the funeral director. It was specifically stated that the family did not have to agree and, in particular cases, the coordinator did not ask the question because of specific circumstances. For the initial arrangement interviews, we considered this 'internship' the best approach. We helped make arrangements and were able to listen to the families, without them feeling they were being 'observed'. Later during the week, when emotions had eased somewhat and there was less of a time rush, we often had talks with the families about what we hoped to learn and why we were walking alongside. We mentioned the study and our interest in the field of the funeral industry. In some cases they were in-

terested, asked questions, and ended up as one of our interviewees. In other cases they showed interest, commented on how we did the job, or merely took in the information. To our knowledge, our presence never damaged the wellbeing of those involved.

After this initial round of fieldwork, we revisited the research problem, focusing more on the processual nature of death ritual, and prepared for a second round of fieldwork. Again, we conducted participant observations for three months at the same funeral company, but instead of interviewing ritual experts we were now interviewing the recently bereaved (n=15). During this period, we also had numerous conversations with ritual experts from other funeral homes and funeral companies, by telephone, or through workshops or lectures that we gave in the field. We also had valuable talks with other individuals in the funeral home, in the crematorium, at grave yards, during lectures, or in everyday settings such as on trains or at social events. Though not as structured as the interviews, these talks influenced the research by bringing in different perspectives, and we used them to test ideas or ask questions about things that were unclear or difficult to ask in other situations. For all the participant observations of funeral ceremonies, we employed an observation guide based on the ritual elements as described by Grimes (2014; cf. Venhorst 2013; see appendix A). The other collected fieldwork material consisted of field notes, mourning cards, and funeral scenarios.

The interviews with the recently bereaved were less explorative than the interviews with the ritual experts. The interviewees were 7 males and 8 females between the ages of 34 and 84 who had recently (up to a year ago) lost an immediate family member, and who were in charge of the funerary practices (appendix E). The funerals in which people had been involved were non-ecclesial, Roman Catholic, or Protestant (3 x n=5). Participants were contacted via ritual experts or directly through our participant observations at the funeral home. The interviews were semi-structured, following a specific interview guide that was altered for each interview, based on the specific context of each case and the outcomes of the earlier interviews (Heldens & Reysoo 2005). The general thread through this guide was the protracted process of death ritual until the present moment of being interviewed (appendix B).

After an introduction, the interviewees were invited to tell their story of how they lost their loved one, both socially and biologically. We often started with illness or anticipation of death, and moved through the funerary practices to the present moment in time. The ways of dying differed among the inter-

viewees and, in some cases, a long period of illness had occurred prior to death. Because of the sensitive topic and the different situations involved, the duration of the interviews varied between 2 and 3.5 hours. They were conducted at the homes of the interviewees to create a comfortable, safe interview setting. The setting and content of the interviews, however, became much more than a safe place, as they provided access to the private spaces wherein the interviewees dealt with loss. Unlike the interviews with the ritual experts, in conversations with the bereaved a space was created that illustrated and evoked the absence–presence of the deceased, and objects of the dead, including ash objects incorporating human matter, became part of the interviews (cf. Valentine 2008). This allowed us to acquire a detailed perspective on death ritual as a protracted process, particularly in relation to the period of bereavement. As with the expert interviews, these interviews have been transcribed, coded, and analysed by the interviewer.

5.3.2 Survey research

On the basis of our interviews and participant observations, we developed and conducted a survey (n=198). Like the interview guides, the survey consisted of questions about people's experiences in relation to the death of a close relative, and the protracted process of death ritual formed the framework of the questionnaire (appendix C). Here we will describe our sampling procedure, the social location of our respondents, and some funeral characteristics. Remarks concerning the measurements and analysis will be given in the relevant sections throughout this book.

5.3.2.1 Sampling and data collection

The most important criterion used to include people in our sample was their involvement with the deceased and with the funerary practices. It is not our goal to make generalisations about 'the Dutch', but rather to explore dynamics in the process of death ritual as experienced by the dearest and nearest bereaved respondents. Therefore, we deliberately focused on people who had been directly, closely, and recently involved with a funeral. Respondents thus had been involved in the arrangements and decisions regarding the funerary practices, and had participated in the funerary practices themselves. To reach this specific group of respondents, people were approached in two ways: through a funeral company and via ministers. One-hundred and sixty-six usable questionnaires were collected using the first approach (response 69%). The original Roman

Catholic slant of the company resulted in the underrepresentation of Protestant respondents in this sample. After initial analysis it was therefore decided to draw a random sample (n=250) of congregations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The minsters of these municipalities were contacted, and 41 percent indicated that they could not cooperate in the research, mostly because they had not recently been involved in a funeral service. Others asked members of their congregation. Thirty-two more questionnaires were retrieved (response 13%).

5.3.2.2 Respondents' social location

The respondents were intimately involved with the deceased (*M*=4.9, *SD*=.47). Most of them had recently lost their parent (55%) or partner (29%). In the other cases a child (4%), sibling (3%), uncle/aunt (2%), friend (1%), or other family member such as grandparent or parent-in-law (6%) had passed away. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were female and 48 percent were male. The oldest participant was born in 1925, and the youngest in 1988 (*Q1*=1946, *Q2*=1955, *Q3*=1963). As for education, 35 percent of our respondents had a low level, 29 percent an average level, and 36 percent a high level. The geographical distribution of the sample is illustrated in appendix D.

Regarding religious characteristics, we looked at religious affiliation and religiosity. Sixty percent of our respondents described themselves as being religiously affiliated (43% Roman Catholic, 16% Protestant, 1% Muslim).[24] We did not differentiate between various categories, such as being atheist or agnostic, in the group of religiously unaffiliated respondents. Although most respondents are religiously affiliated, they generally do not describe themselves as being religious (*M*=2.5, *SD*=1.15). Taking frequencies into account, 49 percent of the respondents identified as not religious, 19 percent as religious, and 32 percent answered this question neutrally.

In view of the numbers of religious affiliation and religiosity, it is fundamental to provide some context and give a few comments. First, it must be remarked, that questions of religious affiliation and religiosity in questionnaires pose difficulties in terms of validity, particularly within a context of secularisation and individualisation. Words like 'religion', 'faith', and 'church' have acquired multivocal meanings and connotations among respondents.[25] Therefore,

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[24] In view of our research question, we have excluded Muslim respondents from our sample.

[25] A further elaboration upon these difficulties can be found in the work of Berghuijs, Pieper and Bakker (2013).

we also included an open question relating to people's worldviews (*levensbeschouwing*), and used this in the examination of our results.[26] Moreover, in view of our analysis, these difficulties implied that the religious characteristics of respondents should be interpreted with care. In trying to categorise the religious location of respondents, it was therefore important to look at religious affiliation and religiosity, as well as at the characteristics of the funeral. Furthermore, we most strongly looked at the items regarding ritual practice and ritual meaning in order to gain insight into the ways wherein people give meaning to the death of a loved one. Second, it must be noted that our sample does not resemble the Dutch population in terms of religious affiliation and religiosity.[27] As our sample was used to explore relevant dynamics in the meaning-making practices of recently bereaved people in contemporary funerary practices, we emphasised the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. In relation to the changing role of religion, our sample has been compiled in such a way as to allow us to create groups in terms of religious affiliation in the analysis, and to enable us to describe religious characteristics in relation to the type of funeral.

5.3.2.3 Funeral characteristics

In addition to the social location of respondents, we will describe some characteristics of the funerals in which people participated in order to illustrate the context of our sample. Sixty-seven percent of our respondents had been involved in a non-ecclesial funeral, 63 percent of which were held in the hall of the crematorium and 4 percent in other locations. Thirty-three percent of our respondents had been involved in an ecclesial funeral, 25 percent of which were performed only in church, and 8 percent in church as well as in the hall of the crematorium.

To have a *non-ecclesial* funeral does not imply that people are religiously unaffiliated, nor does it simply reveal whether people identify with being religious or not. The deceased is said to be religiously unaffiliated in 40 percent of the cases and 42 percent of the bereaved respondents that participated in

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[26] Unfortunately, there is no room to analyse and elaborate upon the question of people's worldviews in detail here.

[27] Controlled for the age distribution of our sample, the numbers of religious affiliation in the Dutch population would be 31 percent in total, of which 15 percent are Roman Catholic, 16 percent Protestant, and 5 percent belonging to another Christian denomination (Bernts & Berghuijs 2016).

a non-ecclesial ceremony described themselves as religiously unaffiliated.[28] Sixty percent of them did not identify as being religious, and only 10 percent did self-identify with religiosity. This evidences a high diversity in terms of religious belonging and believing in non-ecclesial funerals.

To have an *ecclesial* ceremony, on the other hand, is more revealing in terms of religious affiliation and religiosity. Since there is a rich funeral market outside the different churches, having a church ceremony has become a specific choice, and religious belonging and religious belief often play a role in the decision to have an ecclesial funeral (Roukema-Koning 2007, 162). Only in 3 percent of the ecclesial ceremonies, the deceased is said to have been religiously unaffiliated. Of the bereaved respondents, only 17 percent were religiously unaffiliated. Furthermore, 35 percent of the respondents identified as being strongly religious and only 27 percent did not identify with being religious. The largest group of 38 percent answered the question of religious affiliation neutrally. These numbers show that having an ecclesial funeral relates more strongly to religious belonging and religious belief, particularly in view of the lifestyle of the deceased. In terms of religiosity, we find a high diversity among the dearest and nearest bereaved, though it is more often identified with in comparison to the non-ecclesial ceremonies.

In our study we have focused on recently held funerals as we are interested in the process of death ritual, that is, the ceremony including its preparation and immediate aftermath. Seventy percent of the funerals had taken place three to eight weeks before their attendees participated in the survey. We aimed to ask people our research questions from three weeks onwards, as the dearest and nearest bereaved are most likely to receive a letter concerning the retrieval of the ashes at this time, as they are allowed to retrieve the ashes from the cremation after the waiting period of thirty days. It is during these moments, when people are confronted by the ashes, that questions and decisions often arise regarding temporal and final disposal. Four percent of our respondents had organised a funeral less than three weeks previous to receiving the questionnaire, and for 3 percent of the respondents, more than a year had elapsed.

Seventy percent of the funerals involved a cremation.[29] Taking religious affiliation into account, we see that 81 percent of the unaffiliated respondents were involved in a cremation, 75 percent of the Roman Catholics, and 28 per-

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[28] This only applies to the dearest and nearest bereaved that filled in the questionnaire; it does not include the other funeral participants.

[29] Nationally, the cremation number in 2015 was 63 percent (LVC 2016).

cent of the Protestants. We will further elaborate on funeral characteristics in relation to ritual practice and ritual meaning in the following two chapters.

5.3.3 Participant observations

Based on the results of the survey and the data from the earlier qualitative fieldwork, we returned to the field for additional participant observations. During a period of two weeks, we conducted participant observations at a funeral home and at a crematorium, again taking the internship approach. In the funeral home, we were invited to accompany a funeral director. In the crematorium we spoke to various employees, observed funerals, helped in the auditorium, assisted with the catering, and walked alongside the cremationist, as well as being present for the ash retrieval. During the participant observations, we gave particular attention to discussions about cremation, continuing bonds, and the body of the deceased: topics that stood out in the survey as well as in the narratives of the recently bereaved, and that needed further clarification.

6 Outline of this book

Following this introductory chapter, subsequent chapters will guide the reader through the protracted process of death ritual, focusing on situational beliefs in relation to ritual practices in view of changing circumstances within the Dutch context. Chapter 2 describes the ritual practices of the funeral ceremony. Chapter 3 explores the ritual meaning of the funerary practices. Chapter 4 draws attention to people's encounters with cremated remains. Chapter 5 moves beyond the funerary rites into the period of bereavement, and describes how people reimagine notions of symbolic immortality. Chapter 6 draws attention to the ways in which the bereaved enact relationships with their deceased, focusing on transforming bonds. In each chapter there is a combination of quantitative and qualitative results, and the concepts of ritual practice and ritual meaning serve as key elements. Chapter 7 gives a synthesis of the conclusions drawn from chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, provides an overarching conclusion, and gives suggestions for further research.

PART I

THE FUNERAL PROCESS

CHAPTER 2

FUNERALISING

RITUAL ACTIONS AND RITUAL ACTORS

Ritual practices and ritual meanings have a close relationship. To grasp the situational beliefs (cf. Stringer 1996; 2008) that emerge in the funerary and bereavement practices of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the Netherlands today, this study begins by mapping the funeral practices that occur. This chapter will highlight the ritual practices of the funeral by describing two sides of the ritual enactment: its preparation and its performance. Although the performance of the funeral provides insight into the diverse ways in which the bereaved ritually respond to a death, it does not reveal their role concerning the ceremony preparation, and fails to highlight the negotiations that occur in the process of funeralising, that is, the making of funeral arrangements (cf. Wojtkowiak 2011). Describing the backstage of the funeral process is revealing, as it is a place of creativity, re-invention, and criticism (Goffmann 1959/1971, 114; Grimes 2014, 117). Funerals are "quilt-like structures", and behind the scenes people search for meaning and create a renewed, tailor-made ritual structure with actions, symbols, and objects, enabling them to collectively say farewell and find support (Grimes 2000, 4–12). Understanding what happens during the ritual preparations is, therefore, fundamental if one wishes to grasp the practices and meanings of the ritual performance. Hence, in this chapter, the ritual practices preceding the funeral will be mapped, and attention will be drawn to the funeral ceremony itself.[1] Thereby, we will confine ourselves to ceremonies performed in church or in the hall of the crematorium.

By describing the ritual practices of the ceremony and its preparation, we aim to explore the building blocks of the ritual performance of death. The approach of mapping ritual elements has been advocated by Ronald Grimes in several of his works (1982; 2003; 2006; 2014). Although ritual is more than the sum of its elements, that is, the smallest identifiable aspects of ritual, this approach has proven to provide a useful framework to observe and interpret diverse aspects of ritual practice (cf. Venhorst 2013). As such, it will allow us to

[1] Parts of this chapter were published in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* (Mathijssen 2013a) and the volume *Changing European Death Ways* (Mathijssen 2013b).

answer the question: *What ritual actions can be observed in the preparation and the performance of funerals of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the Netherlands, and what actors play a role in this process?* This chapter thus describes the ritual actions and ritual actors of the preparation and performance of the funeral, allowing us to elaborate on ritual meaning-making in the next chapter.

To examine ritual actions and the roles of ritual actors, we will first draw attention to the key concepts of this study (§2). After some brief methodological remarks (§3), we will map the diverse practices of the funeral preparations and performance (§4). Thereby, particular attention will be given to the arrangement interview (§4.1), to the preparations in terms of funeral content (§4.2), and to the funeral performance itself (§4.3). Subsequently, we will describe the ritual roles that emerge during the process of funeralising (§5). The roles of the bereaved and the deceased (§5.1), of ritual experts (§5.2 & §5.3), as well as of the corpse (§5.4) will be examined. We will conclude by reflecting on the concept of ritual practice in relation to the process of funeralising (§6).

1 Key concepts: Ritual practice

The key concepts of ritual practice and ritual meaning, as discussed in the introduction, enable us to emphasise particular elements of funeral preparation and performance. Based on the works of Ronald Grimes, in chapters 2 to 4, three ritual elements – ritual actions, ritual actors, and ritual meaning – will be distinguished in relation to three contexts: the changing role of religion, the process of individualisation in Dutch society, and the development of modern cremation (Figure 2.1). These three elements are not a direct copy of any particular framework of ritual elements as described by Grimes. Also, it is a different and much shorter list than the one that we used during our participant observations (appendix A). In view of our particular research context and research questions, and considering the structure of this chapter and subsequent chapters, we have adjusted Grimes' framework and combined certain ritual elements. Ritual objects, places, and languages, for example, are not mentioned as separate elements, but will be discussed as part of ritual actions and meanings. Also, other elements, such as sources, purposes and functions, times, and criticism and interpretation, will receive attention in the overarching description of ritual elements.

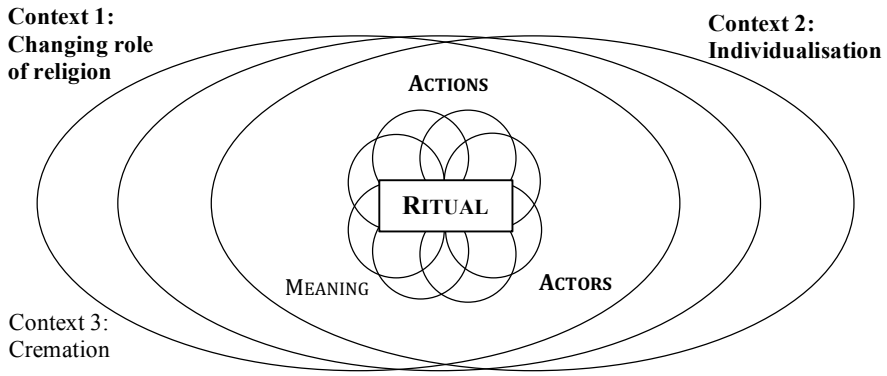

FIGURE 2.1 ELEMENTS OF RITUAL, BASED ON RONALD GRIMES

This chapter focuses on the ritual actions and ritual actors in view of two developments, or contexts, in Dutch society: the process of individualisation and the changing role of religion. By situating ritual actions, actors, and meaning in one model, we aim to emphasise that these building blocks belong together. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the development of cremation in Dutch society has had an impact on funeral preparations and performance. Chapter 3 will describe ritual meaning in the preparation and performance of the funeral, as regards contexts 1 and 2. Chapter 4 will draw attention to context 3, cremation.

1.1 The protracted process of death ritual

In chapter 1 we have described death ritual as a protracted process of accumulative rites that takes the living through various phases of separation, transition, and incorporation, according to the ways the living perceive the condition of the deceased (Suzuki 2000, 18; Van Gennep 1960; Hertz 1907/1960). This notion of death ritual as being prolonged will come most prominently to the fore in chapter 6, which provides a ritual perspective on ongoing relationships between the living and the dead during the period of bereavement after the funeral. However, the notion of death ritual as a protracted process is also fundamental for the process of funeralising and the performance of the funeral. Our processual view on death ritual implies that various stages and ritual elements are connected, as ritual elements – the actions as well as their symbolic meanings – are positioned in relation to one another (Turner 1973, 1103). The way in which the deceased is dressed during the preparation of the ceremony, or the way in which

the deceased is portrayed during the ceremony, for example, may not only illustrate a quest for meaning or evidence particular beliefs regarding immortality, but it may also evoke meaningful images and memories that continue to influence the meaning-making processes of the bereaved after performing the funeral. The way in which the funeral is shaped and performed, in other words, is likely to shape other ritual practices and ritual meanings, for instance, during the period of bereavement.

1.2 Personalised rites of passage and ritual re-invention

In view of changing circumstances in Dutch society, this chapter will look at the influence of the changing role of religion and individualisation in funeral preparations and performance. Research on death ritual, in the Netherlands and beyond, has drawn much attention to the rise of 'personalised' funerals. It has been emphasised that personalised funeral ceremonies reflect the individualised lifestyle of late modernity (Holloway et al. 2013; Davies 2015, 26), are increasingly informal (Wouters 2002), and are characterised by a high degree of personal choice and ritual creativity (Walter 2005, 186; Venbrux, Heessels & Bolt 2008). Attention in this regard has also been given to contemporary consumer culture, and to the emergence of new groups of ritual experts (Howarth 1996; Venbrux, Peelen & Altena 2009; Engelke 2015). Lastly, the personalisation of Roman Catholic funerals in the Netherlands has been elaborately documented (Quartier 2007; 2009; 2011). However, our understanding of contemporary personal funerals can be further elucidated. The funeral arrangements of the recently bereaved, in relation to the actual performances of ecclesial and non-ecclesial funeral ceremonies in the Netherlands, have not been documented, and although the emergence of new ritual experts has been mentioned, their ritual roles remain unstudied so far.

1.3 Research questions

In terms of ritual practice, to summarise, we are thus interested in two ritual elements in the context of individualisation and the changing role of religion. In relation to ritual actions, we will examine what constitutes the preparation and the performance of the funeral. Regarding ritual actors, we will study the roles of the deceased, the bereaved – predominantly the dearest and nearest bereaved, but also the wider audience that participates in the funeral – and the ritual experts in the preparation and performance of the funeral.

2 Methods

The value of the mixed methodology of the research project comes evidently to the fore in the mapping of ritual practices. The mapping of the funeral preparations and funeral performances is based on our participant observations, observations of funeral ceremonies, interviews with ritual experts, interviews with recently bereaved people, and the survey research carried out among recently bereaved people. For each ritual element, the results from different methods provide different perspectives on the ritual performance.

3 Mapping ritual actions

Over two-thirds of the Dutch have funeral insurance, and during the last century funeral funds developed into specialised and consumer-oriented undertaker businesses (Venbrux, Peelen & Altena 2009). This professionalisation of the Dutch funerary landscape has resulted in highly organised funeral arrangements. Having a well-structured and demarcated funeral preparation period has further been stimulated by the Dutch Burial and Cremation Act, predominantly by article 16, prescribing that the burial or cremation has to take place by the sixth working day after death, at the latest. During this week, between biological death and the performance of the ceremony, most of the actual funeral preparations take place. Based on their significance to the bereaved and to professionals, we will draw attention to three main events that occur during this week: the arrangement interview, including discussions of the washing and dressing of the deceased, the preparations concerning the content of the ceremony, and the funeral ceremony itself.

3.1 The arrangement interview

After being confronted with biological death, the actual week of funeral preparations is set in motion. The funeral director is most likely to visit the family for the arrangement interview on the day death has occurred, or the day after. By then, the deceased has often already left the home, and is in the custody of the undertaker.

During the arrangement interview, generally lasting three hours, all practical matters are discussed regarding the care for the body of the deceased, the selection of a coffin, the funeral preparations, the funeral, and the bodily disposal. Thereby, the funeral director often follows a particular protocol or checklist, either brought along on paper or being memorised by heart. After an introductory talk about the death that has occurred and those who are involved,

the funeral director explains the goals of the arrangement interview, creating a framework that provides structure and security for the bereaved. The interview can then follow different courses, depending on the working habits of the funeral director and the circumstances. However, in the arrangement interviews wherein we participated it was common to first discuss the fundamental choices regarding the type, location, and timing of the funeral. The funeral director has to ascertain whether there will be a cremation or a burial, and whether there will be an ecclesial, non-ecclesial, or other type of ceremony. To arrange details with the crematorium, cemetery, and/or church, the funeral director and the family furthermore have to decide upon the place, time, and duration of the funeral. These choices determine the length, phasing, and rhythm of the 'arrangement-week', and thus also influence the other choices that must be made during the interview:

> During a participant observation of an arrangement interview, taking place on a Tuesday in the region of Amsterdam, the topic of the cremation ceremony was brought to the table. A discussion emerged regarding the location and day of the ceremony, which was to influence the later arrangements. The family was longing for closure, and emphasised that the ceremony should take place "not later than Friday". A call was made to the crematorium in Haarlem, but unfortunately it was fully booked. The cremation could only take place on Saturday or Tuesday. Another call was made to the crematorium in Driehuis, where the ceremony could take place on Friday afternoon. These two choices sparked a discussion. The deceased was born and raised in Haarlem, and the family felt he should have his funeral in 'his city': "He was a true *Haarlemmer*". However, in this instance the timing of the funeral was considered even more important, and the time-slot on Friday was chosen. Three days from now, the ceremony would take place, and the other arrangements had to be pushed within this limited time frame. (Participant observation arrangement interview)

The nature, place, and time of the funeral are negotiated based on the wishes and the identity of the bereaved, as well as the deceased, and are fundamental in view of the other arrangements that must be made, for instance, the writing of mourning cards. Not commonly used in all countries in Europe, the Dutch typically write – or e-mail – cards to notify their relatives, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances of the death that has occurred, and to inform them about, and in-

vite them to, the funeral that will take place.[2] Sending these cards is such a commonality that a certain number of cards is generally included in the funeral insurance. Writing or composing the text for the mourning card, which is often done during the arrangement interview, can pose challenges to the bereaved, as well as to the funeral director. To write things down is to make a decision, and it makes the event of death tangible. For the professionals it can be particularly stressful in terms of time (and grammar). Not only do the cards have to be written within a reasonable amount of time during the interview, they must also arrive on time at their destination to inform the social circle of the bereaved. To run this process as smoothly as possible, the funeral professionals are armed with templates to provide the bereaved with options regarding different designs, images, and texts from which to choose. The draft is often printed during the interview, to be read aloud to check the tone, rhythm, and grammar of the text. The bereaved, of course, can also make their own suggestions:

> During an interview with Yvonne, whose brother had passed away, she explained that her brother wanted to have a croupier's rake with him during his last week. "He always used to complain about his work in the casino, but now I thought 'See, you did enjoy it'. He just wanted to have it with him." We did not discuss the rake any further, but when I received the mourning card of the funeral, there it was, prominently on top of the card. Rather than choosing from one of the templates, Yvonne had decided to use the rake to personalise the mourning card of her brother. (Yvonne, interview recently bereaved)

Furthermore, new ways of informing the social network have emerged, such as social media or the use of online postcard services.

Now that these fundamental choices have been made – there will be a funeral, at a specific date and time, and the bereaved are able to inform everyone who has to be informed – the rhythm of the interview often changes and there is room to discuss other practical matters. A decision must be made regarding the type of coffin and also the flowers. Again, a wide variety of choice is given to the bereaved, and commonly books with types of coffins and bouquets are brought to the table. Particularly regarding flowers, which tend to be rather expensive, people often make arrangements themselves, for example, with the local florist. People can also choose a coffin that is not provided by the

[2] In England, for example, people are not invited to the funeral by mourning cards, but via funeral ads, word of mouth, and nowadays social media.

funeral company, but this can prove problematic in terms of time and sometimes in view of the insurance. The inclusion of particular coffins in the funeral insurance, often in kind, thus, strongly influences the choice being made.

Another arrangement that must be ticked off the list is the 'coffee-table'. In the Netherlands it is common to have a social gathering with all or a selection of funeral participants after the ceremony, including food and drinks (traditionally coffee and cake), which can be organised in the crematorium. An English colleague once described the Dutch crematoria as hotels, well furbished, with a coffee room or even a restaurant where people can gather. If the bereaved wish to make use of these facilities, this has to be communicated to the crematorium. Not only does the space have to be booked, but it must also be decided what will be served. In view of time restrictions, costs, atmosphere, or the importance of a particular pub or restaurant for the deceased and/or the bereaved, many people organise their 'coffee-table' at a different location:

> [At the funeral] I didn't recognise Peter in the speeches. In a certain way, it felt like sitting at another person's funeral. Luckily his song was played at the end of the ceremony, but it wasn't a good goodbye. After the funeral, we gathered with some friends and decided to go the pub. At the terrace, which he himself had built, we drank his favourite type of beer and we told each other stories and anecdotes about him. This felt like a proper salute. (Participant observation funeral & coffee-table)

Additionally, two other fundamental matters have to be ascertained during the arrangement interview. First, the presence and role of the ritual expert, which strongly depends on the funeral being ecclesial or non-ecclesial, has to be decided. In the case of an ecclesial funeral the choice for a pastor is made based on the religious community and the wishes of the deceased. However, the wishes of the bereaved also influence this choice. When, for example, a large gap exists between the deceased and the bereaved, in terms of religious belonging and belief, this might influence the choice for a particular religious celebrant. Subsequently, an appointment is made with the religious ritual expert for another arrangement interview to decide upon the content of the ceremony. When the bereaved have chosen a non-ecclesial ceremony, the funeral director has to discuss whether the bereaved want to organise the content of the ceremony themselves, or whether they want to involve a ritual expert – other than the funeral director. A whole new group of ritual experts has emerged in the Netherlands – often named ritual coaches or ritual guides, but also referred to as civil cele-

brants, funeral speakers, or funeral coaches – that can assist the bereaved in preparing and performing the funeral.

Second, the care for the body of the deceased must be discussed. At the time of the interview, the deceased has often already been laid in state, sometimes with the active involvement of the bereaved. During the arrangement interviews, this was often the topic most revealing in terms of beliefs regarding the ongoing presence of the deceased, and in terms of expressing the fundamental values of the life of the deceased – as we will illustrate in detail later. Together with the funeral director, the family has to decide what type and what amount of care will be given to the deceased.[3] It is common practice for the mortuary technicians to wash and dress the deceased, but the funeral directors have to ask permission for them to perform certain acts, such as closing the mouth, replacing dentures, creating fuller cheeks, and using a particular kind of cream for the skin. In terms of dressing the dead, the bereaved are invited to pick clothes, make-up, jewellery, and other personal items, such as glasses. Sometimes a picture can help to visualise the preferred post-mortem appearance, and the funeral director can borrow a picture to convey the wishes of the family to the mortuary technicians.

Also fundamental to this process, are decisions regarding the involvement of the bereaved. They can wash and dress their deceased, to a greater or lesser extent, or help with arranging the hair and make-up. Whereas some funeral directors and mortuary technicians say that people nowadays are more often involved in washing and dressing the deceased, others seriously challenge the notion of such increased involvement: "Not many people assist us in the morgue. It depends and varies a bit, but I think it happens only five times a month" (mortuary technician). If decided upon, the bereaved will assist in caring for the body of the deceased in the days after the arrangement interview:

> During the participant observation of an arrangement interview in the region of Amsterdam, when the funeral director was making phone calls to arrange a celebrant, a discussion emerged between the widow and her son about the care of their husband and father, who had passed away. The son asked me whether they could help with dressing their father, to which I responded positively. The widow told her son that she did not feel comfortable having to dress him, but she still wanted to be involved. She immediately went upstairs to look for clothes and his glasses. Without those, "it wasn't him". In

[3] Since 2010, thanatopraxy, a light form of embalming, has been legalised in the Netherlands and since then it has become an option for the bereaved, though it is not always mentioned during the arrangements.

> the meantime, the son of the deceased called his daughter, who agreed to help. "Now we can do something for dad together." (Participant observation arrangement interview)

In addition, viewing arrangements are made during the interview with the funeral director. The family has to consider whether they want to visit the deceased, and in relation to this they have to decide upon the residence of the deceased until the funeral ceremony. The deceased can either stay in the funeral home, in the morgue, in a private chamber, or 'at home'. This can be the deceased's home, but also the home of one of the family members. When the deceased stays in the morgue, the family can make an appointment to visit. Before the appointment, the deceased is moved to a mourning room (in Anglican funeral parlance referred to as the chapel of rest), where the bereaved can visit or say goodbye. This is often combined with a 'wake', providing people with the opportunity to say goodbye before the coffin is closed. Another common option given to the bereaved is to rent a 24/7 private mourning chamber. In this case, the deceased is placed in the mourning chamber, full time, until the funeral takes place. The bereaved can visit at any time, and often have a separate key to enter the room. In relation to these viewings, it must also be decided when the coffin will be closed, and who will be present.

Last but not least, there is the important matter of finance. Depending on the situation – the existence of insurance, the amount of insured capital, and the working habits of the funeral director – this can be meticulously discussed right at the beginning or near the end of the arrangement interview. When money is not an issue, although it usually is to some extent, it is not always urgent to discuss financial matters in detail straight away. The financial situation, however, can also strongly determine the choices being made in view of the funeral. Every service has a price tag, sometimes with the exception of the religious celebrant, and costs vary for different options of coffins, foods, drinks, ritual experts, post-mortem care, and so on.[4] At the end of the arrangement interview, the funeral director prints the contract, to be signed, with all the arrangements being made. This also includes the preliminary costs, and shows what is insured.

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[4] Religious celebrants often don't charge for the funeral ceremony. However, exceptions are nowadays more commonly made in cases where the deceased and/or the bereaved were not active church members. One minister, for instance, explained the logic that she followed in her church, namely, that active church members have safeguarded their funeral by contributing to the church throughout their lives. For those who have not, however, a contribution must be asked for the funeral, specifically in view of the future vitality of the church.

3.1 Creating funeral content

In addition to the practical arrangements, the content of the funeral ceremony has to be shaped. In the dialectic of ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, we observed two customary ways of doing so. First, the bereaved can prepare and enact the ceremony themselves, often in dialogue with the funeral director. In these do-it-yourself funerals, the funeral director can welcome and thank the funeral participants at the beginning and end of the ceremony on behalf of the family, but the further preparation and enactment of the funeral is largely up to the bereaved. During the arrangement interview, remarks are already made to guide the bereaved through the preparations in terms of content. The auditorium is booked for a specific amount of time – typically between forty minutes and one hour – and to assist the bereaved in creating a funeral within this time frame, they are often given a handout or example of how to build up a ceremony. The number of speakers is mentioned in view of the length of the ceremony, and also the role of children or grandchildren can be discussed. Furthermore, the choice of music is brought up, particularly regarding the available repertoires at the crematorium, or – if people want to bring their own music – to make sure they check whether the music works at the crematorium beforehand. Even though the bereaved organise the funeral themselves, the funeral director stays in touch to assist if needed and to make sure no unsolvable problems arise.[5] Their assistance, however, tends to focus more upon matters of practical and pastoral support than upon matters of ritual meaning and the content of the ceremony:

> As a ritual expert, you become more minimal with the course of time. Minimal, like the music. You have a place in the background, as small as possible. The family arranges things, and you assist them whenever necessary. You cannot underestimate the family. They will notice if you do so. They are able to do many things themselves. (Participant observation funeral director)

The second option, as we have already seen, is that the family involves an ecclesial or non-ecclesial ritual expert who assists them in the preparation and performance of the funeral. In this case, another preparation interview is planned, which, depending on the circumstances, lasts between two and four hours. Situ-

[5] Sometimes, the funeral director revisits the family if this is needed. This can happen in view of practical arrangements, but also in relation to the content of the ceremony. It is not always possible to make all arrangements in the initial interview.

ating ecclesial and non-ecclesial experts in the same category of preparation interviews is to make clear that the newly emerging group of ritual experts fulfils the same role as the traditional group of ritual experts. Both ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies have become tailor-made in Dutch society, and the bereaved actively take part in making choices regarding structure and content. As a result, a constant process of negotiation among the bereaved, as well as between the ritual expert and the bereaved, can be observed during the preparations wherein ritual criticism plays a major role. The experts we interviewed, with an ecclesial as well as non-ecclesial background, viewed it as their task to provide scope for re-inventing and re-imagining ritual elements:

> I want to make sure that the funeral is doing justice to the life of the deceased, but also fits with the bereaved. (Interview ritual coach)
>
> There is a significant change there. Not only in the words I'm asked to speak, but also in the fact that the family wants to preside at the ceremony and performs all sorts of ritual-like things. Flowers, candles, stories. Everyone wants to be involved. (Interview Protestant minister)
>
> In our time, the individual is paramount. In our time, people want everything to be personal. This also includes their funeral […]. Liturgy must be at the service of the people. People should not be serving the liturgy. (Interview ritual coach/pastoral worker)

Furthermore, the bereaved themselves emphasised the process of negotiation during the funeral preparations, and underlined their dialogue with the ritual experts:

> I didn't know whether it was important to him to have an ecclesial ceremony, because we hadn't talked about it in the end. But before he fell ill, we did. When my sister was cremated, he told me he didn't like the ceremony. And with the funeral of my mother [in church], he said he thought it was beautiful. Uhm, yes … It sounds strange, doesn't it? When you are not an active or practicing church member. It feels like performing a play, but a church funeral, in my view, is very comforting. Those rituals. When the pastoral worker arrived, I explained I did not want to have all those litanies and prayers you get in a standard ceremony. I wanted to have it personal, and together, we were able to arrange that. (Heleen, interview recently bereaved)

The outlook of the preparation interview and the prominence of the role of the ritual expert strongly depend on the situation and on the wishes of the bereaved.

First, the family can have a more or less detailed vision of what the funeral should look like, and of what constitutes a 'good' funeral. Second, it depends on the preparation of the bereaved prior to the meeting with the ritual expert. At the end of the interview with the funeral director, people are often invited to think about their wishes regarding the content of the funeral. This groundwork influences the scope of the bereaved and the expert. Third, the outlook of the preparation interview depends on whether the bereaved want to be actively involved in creating the funeral, and whether they wish to perform, or not perform, elements during the ceremony. The more the bereaved are involved, the less prominent the role of the ritual expert in the preparation and the performance. Lastly, there are also the working habits of the ritual expert, his view on what the bereaved and a ritual expert should or should not do, and his notion of what constitutes a proper ceremony:

> I really try to focus on the things that the family hands to me. Sometimes I move certain ritual elements if it seems to fit better in the ceremony as a whole, but it is not about me. I'm at the service of the family, and I adjust myself to their life views, to their values. (Interview ritual coach)
>
> I often give tasks to the bereaved. I think it is very important for them to think about what the funeral should look like. And to do things. To be actively involved, together. (Interview ritual coach/pastoral worker)

The preparation interview commonly and naturally starts with a narrative about the deceased, regardless of differences in terms of active involvement, and regardless of whether the funeral will be ecclesial or not. The life story of the deceased is an important starting point in making decisions regarding the content of the ceremony, and builds trust between the bereaved and the expert. Hence, the bereaved are invited to tell about their deceased, and the ritual expert observes, listens, and asks questions. Sometimes, the expert knew the deceased, but increasingly this is not the case. Unlike the traditional experts, most new ritual experts do not belong to the (religious) community of the deceased and the bereaved. The anonymity of the religious experts is also enhanced due to the movement of people to homes for the elderly with different religious experts, the geographical spread of and decreased church membership among the bereaved, and the merging and closing of churches. In dialogue with the bereaved, the ritual expert tries to understand, grasp, and feel what kind of person the deceased had been:

> When I visit the family, I always discuss two things with them. I start with the shape of the funeral. What image do they have of the ceremony? And then we will discuss the story of the deceased's life. I just invite them to elaborate thereupon. I write everything down […] and then go home again. There, I allow the story to sink in, and then I'll start. I always try to include an overall theme, a sort of read thread through the ceremony. Something that stood out during my talk with the family. And the life of the deceased is interwoven throughout the funeral as well. (Interview ritual coach/pastoral worker)

> My goal during the preparation interview is to collect information to shape the ceremony. It means I always structure the interview around three topics: remembering, reflecting, and entrusting someone to the mystery of death. So with these three things in mind, I'm listening to the bereaved and ask questions. But I only tell them what I'm looking for after a little while, so I've been able to observe the situation and we've been able to induce a bit of calmness into the preparations. (Interview ritual coach)

In this way the experts learn about the life, the wishes, and the frame of reference of the deceased and the bereaved. Based on this, the story of the deceased's life can be written, often to be read out as the eulogy at the beginning of the ceremony. This story can take various shapes, varying from a more chronological or factual narrative to a story full of anecdotes and lessons to be learnt from the deceased. Although the experts all said they adjusted the form and content of the story based on the wishes and input of the bereaved, they simultaneously aspired to create a meaningful story, and many had a clear understanding of what such a story should involve:

> I always try to tell the story of one's life and not the life story. Although it depends on the family. Sometimes they want a chronological overview of the life course of the deceased. I always tell my colleagues: if you hear me say that Leo was born in [that street] and went to school [in a neighbouring town], I have not been able to grasp the essence of the deceased's life. Sometimes you just don't get the information you need and you have to fall back on facts […] Personally, I feel that a factual story is an impoverished story. For me, it has to be filled with meaning. What kind of person was the deceased? What sort of chap? […] And during the preparations I try to find out whether there are issues or fears among the immediate family. It helps to talk about such things, and enables me to find the nuances of the deceased's character for the story. (Interview ritual coach/pastoral worker)

The eulogy or life story can be written by the bereaved as well as by the ritual expert, depending on the wishes of the bereaved. It can also be decided that the

bereaved write the story, and the expert will read it during the actual funeral. Part of the funeral preparations is also the writing of a little personal remembrance card, often portraying the same (summarised) life story of the deceased, to be given to the funeral participants after the ceremony as a memento.

After the preparation interview there is often room for feedback. It is common to give the bereaved the possibility to read or listen to the life story before the ceremony. In this way, according to the ritual experts, one is confident about the absence of factual mistakes in the narrative about the deceased. Furthermore, it can be a way to check whether one has grasped the essence of the identity of the deceased through the eyes of the bereaved, and by some experts it is seen as a way to emotionally prepare the bereaved with regard to the ceremony. Some experts also allow the bereaved to make changes concerning the shape of the story, but others are more reluctant in this respect:

> Beforehand, I never give texts to the bereaved […] but I make an exception for the eulogy. If they wish to see that before the ceremony, that's possible and I usually send it to them by e-mail. I do, however, give them a clear restriction: you may comment on the content, but not on the form, because it is my text. (Ritual coach/pastoral worker)

> [After the interview] I go home to create the entire ceremony. And then I visit the bereaved again, and I read the eulogy out loud. […] Often, they get very emotional, and then I think: "Okay, I have grasped their feelings, I have touched their hearts. Then, it is good […] And normally I don't have to make adjustments. Perhaps a little sentence or a date. Or we've forgotten something, or decide to skip a particular topic. (Ritual coach)

The ritual expert is also alert to the group dynamics among the bereaved. "They not only have to continue their lives without their deceased loved one, but also with one another," as one of our interviewees remarked. As such, the placement of the bereaved during the preparation interview is an important element in understanding social relationships. This is also true for the arrangements with the funeral director. Who is sitting at the head of the table? Who is not joining the table at all? Who sits by whom? Also, the presence or absence of certain people during the interview helps the ritual expert to understand the social dynamics. Furthermore, the expert takes the broader group of future funeral participants into account, as he ideally wishes to create a funeral that is meaningful to everyone. All funeral participants have had a relationship with the deceased and/or the bereaved, and the ritual experts view it as their job to honour this as much as

possible. The story of the life of the deceased is seen as a fundamental element to accomplish:

> You not only perform the ceremony for the immediate family. Also for the people who have shared a warm relationship with the deceased. (Ritual coach)
>
> Everyone has to be able to become immersed in the ceremony. The most important element therefore is the story of the deceased, of this particular man or woman. It is therefore important for the family, friends, and colleagues to be involved. That they tell the story of the deceased. (Minister)
>
> [In the life story, I always try to] address relationships: "Some of you knew him as a little boy" and then you appeal to a particular group and tell an anecdote. And then I'll say, something like: "You knew him as your husband. The day the two of you met, what a delight that was! Dancing in [that club], and all he'd drink was chocolate milk. No beers, just chocolate milk." And then everyone remembers, oh dear, that chocolate milk. I try to appeal to the diverse people present, and I always try to make room for other memories that are not explicitly addressed too. (Ritual coach)

3.1.1 Non-ecclesial funeral preparations

In light of the narrative about the life of the deceased, and with regard to the wishes of the bereaved, further ritual actions are discussed and the ceremony acquires its shape. Although the lifestyles of the deceased and the bereaved are the most important sources in preparing the content of the funeral, the process of co-creation (Kelly 2008, 66) between the bereaved and ritual experts takes a somewhat different path from here onwards, depending on the non-ecclesial or ecclesial character of the ceremony.

Although non-ecclesial funeral ceremonies are commonly typified as being highly individualised, a common set of ritual actions emerges from our participant observations in the preparation interviews. Decisions regarding speakers were discussed in all interviews, and choices were grounded in the pragmatic situation of who wishes and who does not wish to speak, and also depended on who had to speak in order to create an accurate and authentic image of the deceased (cf. Bailey & Walter 2016). The decision of *who* speaks is thus related to ideas of what constitutes a good funeral. The speakers that are chosen reflect the essence of the life of the deceased, and the meaning of his life in relation to others. Not only the words being said are considered important, but the relationship of the speaker with the deceased matters. Furthermore, the social dynamics among the bereaved are emphasised by the choice of speakers, as de-

cisions in this regard influence and illustrate the power relationships of the family. A consensus must be reached regarding who performs and who prepares which elements.

The music for the ceremony was also dealt with in all preparation interviews. Final decisions about the songs and tunes being played were not always made, but it was at least encouraged to think about the music and its meaning, and about what the music expresses. The deceased's taste in music played an important role in the making of decisions, and also music that reminded the bereaved of shared and treasured experiences. Sometimes, in view of the situation at hand and the suggestions of the bereaved, or lack thereof, the ritual expert emphasised what music could express during the ceremony. In several instances, it was suggested to look at the lyrics in relation to the life of the deceased. Thereby, the importance of fitting lyrics was emphasised:

> This was a son, fifteen-years-old, who had lost his father. And they chose that song of Stef Bos, called *Papa* [Daddy]. Then I thought, we cannot do that, really not. Because there are lyrics about a boy… It just didn't fit. So after some hesitation, I decided to send the lyrics to the family and asked them whether they really wanted this. I explained why I thought it didn't fit, and they were actually quite shocked by the lines. They had only looked at the title. So the son picked something else that fitted really well with everyone. (Ritual coach)

Also the emotions of the bereaved were mentioned in relation to choosing music. This involved the general feeling of having to say farewell, but also other emotions of gratefulness, compassion, anger, and denial:

> Last week I had a funeral, and the widow… She was in shock. She could not accept the death of her husband. Then, you have to offer something different. I found lyrics that exactly gave voice to her feelings. To that sense of denial. It fully captured that. […] When I heard her story, I suddenly realised I had a piece of music somewhere that might provide some comfort to her. […] It is not only about the deceased, you know. (Ritual coach)

Another fundamental element that was reflected and decided upon during the preparations was the role of objects. The symbolic function of objects – as well as of the earlier mentioned speakers, speeches, and music – was implicitly discussed during the preparations, although the connotation 'symbol' was rarely used. In relation to the role of symbolic vehicles, Sperber's entanglement of

symbolic properties is helpful (1975, 147–148). He shows that (ritual) symbols trigger focalisation, which is accompanied by evocation. Through objects, attention is drawn to 'the essence' of the deceased's life, evoking inspiration that simultaneously transcends it (Quartier 2009b; Riis & Woodhead 2010). In the preparation of the funeral, objects are thus chosen that express and transcend the identity of the deceased. By choosing a photo of the deceased to place in the auditorium, for instance, or by creating a slide show with pictures of the deceased, a public post-mortem identity of the deceased is shaped by the bereaved. Thereby certain memories, characteristics, and aspects of his identity are emphasised over others. Here, the 'audience' of funeral participants is also taken into account. Which images and anecdotes may be portrayed front stage, and which ones may not?

Other objects are also chosen to celebrate and commemorate the life that has been lived, varying from shoes to embroidery to bikes. Through searching for and using such personal symbols (Quartier 2009b), focus is again drawn into the ceremony and certain qualities of the life of the deceased are elevated. We will illustrate this in more detail below, in relation to the meaning of the funeral preparations and performance. What must be mentioned here, in terms of the preparation practices, is that the ritual experts consider it their task to add symbolic depth to the life story of the deceased, in the sense that the funeral not merely represents, but also goes beyond, the individual life that has been lived. The experts thereby strongly shape the symbolic qualities of ritual actions, rather than the bereaved themselves, not only by emphasising the importance of symbolic vehicles, but also by creating a symbolic narrative in relation to objects and other ritual actions, through which they express the inexpressible, signify ongoing relationships, and capture the mystery of life and death (Adamson & Holloway 2013). Symbolic meaning can be embedded in specific ritual actions, but symbols are also positioned in relation to one another (Turner 1973) and, as such, become the overall theme or red thread running through the ceremony, as one of the interview fragments has already illustrated. As such, the funeral as a whole can become a symbolic event.

3.1.2 Ecclesial funeral preparations

In the case of an ecclesial funeral, speakers, music, and objects are also negotiated upon, including their symbolic meaning, and the preparation interview follows a similar course. The main difference to be observed is the prominent role of a particular religious tradition in view of the funeral performance, both in

terms of structure and in terms of meaning. Thus, not only are the lives of the deceased and the bereaved a vital source, but religious tradition is as well. Religious tradition, however, has no pre-given authority in the sense that it only plays a role when considered meaningful to the deceased and/or the bereaved. Furthermore, what people envision to be a 'Christian' funeral varies from person to person. For some it might be the celebration of the Eucharist, for others it is only the performance of a prayer. Therefore, we encountered ongoing negotiations between tradition and innovation in relation to the limits of interpreting, stretching, and redefining ritual elements (Hüsken & Neubert 2011).

Choosing an ecclesial funeral ceremony provides the bereaved, as well as the ritual expert, with a relatively clear framework – descriptive in the case of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, prescriptive in the case of the Roman Catholic Church – within and around which choices regarding ritual structure and ritual meaning are being made. There are different frameworks to choose from, each leaving a particular mark on the character of the liturgy. In both Roman Catholic and Protestant funerals, the ceremony can be shaped as a word, prayer, or Eucharistic ceremony, the latter including the celebration of the communion, Eucharist or Lord's Supper (*Nationale Raad voor de Liturgie* 1976; *Redactie Dienstboek* 2004). Often, the type of ecclesial ceremony has already been decided upon with the funeral director, as it also influences, in the case of a Eucharist, who is to perform the ceremony. During the conversation with the pastor the type of ecclesial service is again brought to the table in view of its actual content and structure. In the different frameworks, a distinct balance between worship and personal remembrance can be observed, the latter being more dominant in word and prayer ceremonies. This balance is negotiated among the recently bereaved and the pastor, and attention is also given to the wishes of the deceased and the heterogeneous group of funeral participants:

> I prefer […] to celebrate the Eucharist, but if the family does not want it, or when there are only a few church members among the mourners, we have a word and prayer ceremony. (Interview Roman Catholic pastor)
>
> I would almost say that a funeral is not a worship ceremony, but a pastoral service, and therefore you move along with the family (Interview Protestant minister)

Regarding ideas about the nature and function of the funeral, we observed some differences between and among the Roman Catholic and Protestant experts in terms of scope for personalised or re-invented elements (cf. Van Tongeren

2007, 12).[6] Among Catholic ritual experts, a spectrum of different stances could be observed. At one end of the spectrum, we found the conviction that room for celebrating the life of the deceased should be demarcated to the *In Memoriam* at the beginning of the ceremony, or at the end, as it is not part of the official liturgy (cf. *Nationale Raad voor Liturgie* 1976, 15; cf. *Bisdom Den Bosch* 2003, 11) and could impair the meaning of the liturgy as a whole. Scope is created for the bereaved and their deceased in choosing texts, psalms, and hymns, and they can decide who performs the reading or intercession, but no additional ritual actions should be added within the official liturgical framework wherein worship is emphasised. Closely related to this perspective, and found among the Protestant as well as Roman Catholic ritual experts we studied, is the conviction that personal stories should also be confined to the *In Memoriam* or Personal Remembrance, but that the essence of the deceased's life is as important as worship during the ceremony. Rather than arguing that the meaning of the liturgy would otherwise be undermined, it was emphasised that the additional ceremony could be set against the life of the deceased as this had already acquired centre stage in the *In Memoriam* or Personal Remembrance at the beginning of the service.

At the other end of the spectrum, a group of Roman Catholic and Protestant ritual experts can be observed readjusting the liturgy to include more ritual actions, stemming from, or directly referring to, the bereaved and their deceased. These experts create further possibilities to add and re-invent ritual elements, whereby one can think of including additional speeches, poems, and popular songs to be performed by a variety of people. This thus influences the number and duration of personal elements, and the structure and meaning of the funeral. When the funeral takes place in an auditorium, there is greater scope for this. The ceremony might, for example, only include a prayer and a blessing. Furthermore, mostly in the case of cremation, a ceremony can be held in church as well as in an auditorium of the crematorium. Having a double ceremony creates the possibility of having both a traditional liturgy and a personalised ceremony. Specifically, in relation to the prescriptive Roman Catholic format, this provides greater scope if the bereaved wish to have a ceremony that crosses the boundaries of the prescribed liturgical script:

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[6] These variations between and among Catholic and Protestant experts have emerged from various influences, such as differences regarding ecclesial structure, the prescriptive or descriptive nature of the liturgy, the local character and recent development of the 'new' Protestant liturgical format, the recent more restorative emphasis in the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the history of funerals as family events, rather than church affairs, in the diverse Protestant traditions (see Mathijssen 2013b).

> During our fieldwork, we observed the funeral of George and spoke to his wife and their children afterwards. In church a traditional Eucharist was held, which followed the format of the Latin liturgy with Gregorian chant. "George has always loved Gregorian music. He could have sung along with every piece that was performed at the funeral," his wife remarked. The traditional liturgical performance meant a lot to her as well as to her husband, but their children and grandchildren were not religiously affiliated and even hesitant concerning the Roman Catholic Church. Before his death, George and his wife had prepared the funeral. To ensure that the ceremony was also meaningful to their children, they created room for a personal touch together with the priest. In the prayers and readings attention was given to his illness and to the family, and after the communion three grandchildren and a close friend came forward. They talked about what they had shared with George and what he had meant to them. After the church ceremony, everyone went to the crematorium where the personal part of the funeral continued. While the music of Frank Sinatra was played, a favourite of George and his wife, everyone was invited to say goodbye in their own way in silence.

After the type of ecclesial funeral is decided upon and the story of the life of the deceased has been alluded to, other ritual actions are considered in dialogue between the bereaved and the religious expert.[7] Texts from scripture are chosen, as well as particular psalms, hymns, or popular songs, and the content of the intercession or prayer of the faithful is discussed. As with the non-ecclesial ceremonies, choices in this regard are commonly made in view of the deceased's life. Furthermore, aspects of the deceased's life here too can form a red thread running through the ceremony:

> When writing mourning cards, one of our interviewees told us he had opened his wife's Bible to look for a fitting passage. In the back, he found a little piece of paper, whereupon she had written a passage about Paradise. As the question of salvation was very important to her, this became the starting point in arranging the funeral, and "Resting in Paradise" became the line on the mourning card.
>
> In another instance, we were preparing the funeral of a Roman Catholic woman who had passed away. Of the three children, one considered herself to be religious and was very active in church. The two others not so much, but as their mother wished to have a Roman Catholic funeral, they all agreed that a Eucharist would be the preferred form. In making decisions regarding the first reading, the story of Martha and Maria popped up. As the

[7] The prominence of the life story of the deceased also depends on the wishes of the deceased and the bereaved. Several ecclesial experts remarked that some people did not want the funeral to be "about them all the time".

> mother-in-law of one of the children, and a close friend of their mother, had passed away three weeks earlier, an analogy was made between the ladies, which seemed very fitting for the funeral.

These examples illustrate how social relationships and situational context determine the shape and content of the ceremony. Furthermore, as with the non-ecclesial funerals, objects fulfil a prominent role in terms of symbolism. In the case of an ecclesial ceremony, they not only commemorate and transcend the life that has been lived, but are also used to build a bridge between religious tradition and the heterogeneous group of funeral participants:

> Some symbols fit very well with a particular person and, at the same time, can create a connection between people. I have a lot of options to pick from, really. The shoes from a person who loved to walk, the cap that father always used to wear, a football. Once, we had a motorbike in the church. That bike had been sacred to the deceased, so we placed it in the front of the church and the bereaved placed a flower bouquet on its seat. [During the ceremony] I transformed the symbol by talking about the motor of society and the community. So I could use it in various ways. First I wasn't sure about this, but a colleague had told me about a young man who had died in a traffic accident on his motorbike. He had decided to start the funeral with the sound of the engine, although he wasn't sure whether this was allowed. [...] The sound triggered so much emotion in people and in the pastor himself that it was a holy experience. No requiem could have done that. It cut through the bone. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

Finally, in the preparation of both ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, the ending of the ceremony and the committal of the deceased have to be addressed. In the case of a burial, it must be decided what will happen at the grave, and who will be present at the internment. In the case of a cremation, the final moments in the auditorium have to be considered. Often, the wider group of funeral participants walks by the deceased to pay their last respects. The dearest and nearest bereaved stay in the auditorium a little longer, to say farewell in a more intimate circle. Sometimes, a specific final tribute is discussed in the preparations, for example, if someone wishes to play an instrument. However, the actual shape of the final moments in the auditorium is commonly not orchestrated, it simply happens.

Regarding cremation, the architecture of the crematorium that has been chosen influences the possibilities and the symbolism of saying goodbye. It is common to leave the coffin in the auditorium, standing as it is. The bereaved

leave the deceased behind in the auditorium, and the professionals guide the deceased to the cremation chamber. In some crematoria the coffin can descend and disappears into the floor, resembling what happens at the grave. In a crematorium in Amsterdam, where we conducted fieldwork, there is the possibility for the coffin to ascend at the end of the ceremony. Although many of these options have resulted from practicalities, they highly influence the symbolism of the final moments of the ceremony. They symbolise the guidance of the deceased to his or her final resting place, something that is marked in a different manner when the coffin is left in the auditorium. Lastly, the witnessing of the incineration can be discussed in either the arrangement or preparation interview. We will focus on these specific cremation aspects in chapter 4.

3.2 The funeral performance

The preparations being made during the arrangement week cumulate in the funeral ceremony. We will describe the funeral practices by looking at the attitudes of our respondents regarding the ritual actions that have been performed in the funerals of their deceased loved ones. This provides us with a starting point to explore ritual meaning in the following chapter.

3.2.1 Ritual actions in the funeral ceremony

Based on our observations and grounded in the liturgical formats of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (*Raad voor Liturgie* 1976; *Dienstboek* 2004), we gave our respondents an overview of ritual actions that could have occurred during the funeral, and asked them to rate the importance of these ritual actions if they had been performed. As we expected people to value all ritual acts in a relatively positive way, we also provided them with an open question. Here respondents were asked which actions had been most meaningful to them, and they were also invited to add elements that were not mentioned in the list. Table 2.1 gives an overview of the ritual actions and the value that our respondents ascribed to them.

At the beginning of the funeral, the deceased is welcomed amidst the community of funeral participants, either in church or in the hall of the crematorium. In church, it is likely for the deceased to be carried inside by his or her loved ones, or by carriers of the funeral company, while an opening song is performed. The broad group of funeral participants is already present and they stand up on the deceased's entrance. The dearest and nearest bereaved are either already sitting at the front of the church, rising up with all those present, or they

accompany the procession with the deceased. In the hall of the crematorium, the deceased can also be ritually carried inside, however, more usually, the deceased is already situated on the catafalque in front, often surrounded by flowers and candles.[8] Once the auditorium is prepared and the ceremony about to start, the dearest and nearest bereaved often enter the auditorium first. When seated, a song is played, the doors are opened, and the other funeral participants enter the room.[9]

Although many funeral directors, non-ecclesial experts, and crematorium employees identified the carrying of the deceased into church or into the auditorium as a meaningful and powerful symbolic action – guiding him to his final resting place – and although this was highly valued by our bereaved respondents, the option of situating the deceased in the auditorium before the start of the funeral is customary, and is often preferred due to the time schedules and logistics of the crematorium. While the dearest and nearest bereaved are commonly waiting in a private family room, and while the other funeral participants are arriving and waiting in the entrance hall or coffee room, the crematorium employees prepare the auditorium for the funeral ceremony. The floor it swept clean, the music is checked, the coffin is situated in front, and bouquets, candles, and other objects are placed on top and around it, thus allowing the dearest and nearest bereaved to also assist.

Once the ceremony has started, candles can be lit around the deceased and a word of welcome is spoken. The placing of candles around the bier is common in Roman Catholic, Protestant, and non-ecclesial ceremonies. The candles can be lit by the ritual expert as well as the bereaved. The expert can also add words to the practice. By emphasising themes such as love, warmth, hope, and sometimes eternal life, a particular meaning is attributed to each light and to situating the deceased in light in general. In non-ecclesial ceremonies,

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[8] The difference between the remembrance and worship character of the ceremony also comes to the fore in the positioning of the deceased in church or in the auditorium. In Roman Catholic funerals, it is common to position the deceased in the same direction as the other participants, belonging to the community of believers, whereas in non-ecclesial and Protestant ceremonies, the deceased is commonly situated facing the bereaved. In Protestant ceremonies, this practice derives from the older tradition in the Netherlands of funerals that were family events, rather than a church affair. Rather than being part of the community that gathers to celebrate God, the deceased is in the midst of the community and his life is remembered – and nowadays 'celebrated'.

[9] During our participant observations, there were quite a few cases where the coffin of the deceased was still open at the beginning of the ceremony. So before the actual ceremony had started, everyone was able to say goodbye in the crematorium hall – or could remain in the coffee room if they preferred. The coffin would be closed by the dearest and nearest bereaved, in the presence of the others, or the others would leave the room for a moment. After the closing of the coffin, often all ritual participants would leave the room with the exception of the dearest and nearest bereaved, who would then take seats at the front, and the ceremony would start with the music and the entering of the other funeral participants.

TABLE 2.1 RITUAL ACTIONS

RITUAL ACTIONS	MEAN (SD)	N
PERSONAL REMEMBRANCE AND SPEECHES	4.6 (.59)	182
MUSIC	4.5 (.68)	194
GOODBYE AT THE END OF THE CEREMONY	4.4 (.69)	176
CARRYING THE DECEASED INTO CHURCH/ CREMATORIUM	4.3 (.84)	119
PERSONAL OBJECTS	4.3 (.80)	174
READING OF POETRY	4.3 (.78)	146
PLACING CANDLES AROUND THE DECEASED	4.1 (.84)	146
SILENCE	4.1 (.79)	168
COMMITTAL (CREMATION OR BURIAL)	4.1 (.96)	129
PREACHING	3.9 (.93)	114
BLESSING	3.9 (1.11)	69
PRAYER	3.7 (.96)	111
BIBLICAL READING	3.4 (1.03)	94
EUCHARIST OR LORD'S SUPPER	3.2 (1.07)	50

adjusted forms of lighting candles are common. Instead of, or in addition to, the lighting of six candles around the deceased, a different number of candles can be lit, and be positioned in alternative ways. A common practice, for example, is the use of tea lights. In ecclesial ceremonies tea lights and other candles are used as well, but they usually do not replace the candles around the bier. Once the deceased has been situated in light, there is a psalm and a prayer in the case of a Roman Catholic or Protestant funeral.

After the performance of these ritual actions, which constitute the opening of the funeral ceremony, room is created for personal remembrance. By giving voice to the life of the deceased at this moment in the ceremony, the ritual actions which follow are situated against the life that has been lived. In accordance with the rise of personalised funerals, the personal remembrance of the deceased and the personal speeches during the ceremony are the most highly valued ritual actions by the dearest and nearest bereaved, with no significant difference in terms of religious affiliation. The high value given to these ritual actions suggests they are both recognisable and meaningful to the bereaved. In other words, they provide scope for the wishes of the bereaved in view of the life of the deceased. Regarding personal remembrance, some differences can be found between Roman Catholic, Protestant, and non-ecclesial funeral ceremonies, in addition to the ones already discussed in the previous paragraph. In non-ecclesial ceremonies the personal remembrance, often referred to as the life story, is the main reading of the ceremony. One could even argue that the whole funeral is a form of personal remembrance, wherein different stories by differ-

ent people provide different perspectives on the life and identity of the deceased. In ecclesial ceremonies, it can also be the main reading, but it is likely to be one of many. However, our results suggest that it is the main ritual action in terms of value for the immediate family.

After the personal remembrance at the beginning of the funeral, the structure of ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals starts to vary more profoundly (cf. Bot 1998). In non-ecclesial ceremonies, there is often a variation of music and speeches. Sometimes poetry or a story is read, or an instrument is played as well. However, the music and speeches are the core, which we strongly see reflected in the high values that the bereaved respondents ascribe to these ritual actions. Like the personal speeches, music is seen as a way of expressing the identity of the deceased. In both ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, room is made for silence, and personal objects, that is, objects relating to, or belonging to, the deceased, are used during the ceremony.

In ecclesial ceremonies, the core of the ceremony is different in character. After the personal remembrance, one or more biblical readings take place, interspersed with singing or instrumental music. Several texts can be chosen from scripture, and this is often done in view of the life of the deceased. The message of the biblical reading, for instance, can be linked to the lessons to be learned from the deceased's life. The biblical lection has been attributed an overall moderate value, but, as one would expect, we find major differences between religious affiliations. Among Protestants, the reading from Scripture is seen as highly important (M=4.1, SD=.63), whereas this is not the case for Roman Catholics (M=3.1, SD=1.02) nor for religiously unaffiliated respondents (M=3.1, SD=.81). This can be explained by the central position of the Bible in Protestant traditions. It also suggests that biblical readings are an important source for meaning-making among Protestants. Furthermore, there is room for a preaching or meditation during the ecclesial ceremony. A profession of faith can be held, as well as an intercession prayer, frequently performed by the bereaved. All these ritual actions are not restricted to ecclesial ceremonies, but can also be part of funerals performed without the church, as the response numbers in our survey results show.

Which religious elements are enacted, depends strongly on the type of church funeral, that is, the word, prayer, or Eucharistic ceremony that has been mentioned earlier. Overall, like the biblical lection, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper is valued moderately by the bereaved. This also holds when we take religious affiliation into account. Religiously unaffiliated respondents express

moderate attitudes towards the value of the Eucharist (M=3.1, SD=.74). Roman Catholics value the celebration of the Eucharist in a moderately positive manner (M=3.4, SD=1.07), which corresponds with the differentiation in terms of religiosity within this group. Protestants value the Lord's Supper in a slightly negative way (M=2.6, SD=1.52); the history of the Protestant churches provides a possible explanation for this. Although the Lord's Supper is one of the sacraments, and is celebrated weekly in some Protestant churches, in others it is often only celebrated a few times a year, and is a disputed ritual action in terms of the relationship between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and in terms of Protestant identity. Another explanation for the moderate to slightly negative values attributed to this ritual action is the presence of a heterogeneous group of funeral participants. When not all participants participate in the communion, its social symbolism can be undermined. As has been illustrated earlier, the existence of a heterogeneous group of participants is an important reason for ritual experts not to perform a Eucharistic ceremony; however, the wishes of the deceased often motivate them to opt for this type of funeral.

Lastly, the end of the funeral is approached. Saying farewell to the deceased at the end of the ceremony is considered very important by our bereaved respondents. During our fieldwork we observed this to be one of the most intense moments of the funeral. In the case of a burial, the deceased and the bereaved (in a smaller or larger group) walk or drive to the grave at the cemetery, and the funeral ceremony ends there. For those not joining them, the ending of the ceremony in church or in the crematorium hall is the final moment to say goodbye. In the case of a cremation there is a slightly different framework, as already discussed in the previous paragraph. Whereas it is not uncommon for a large group of people to join the dearest and nearest bereaved at the graveside, it is – at this moment in time – impossible for the wider group of funeral participants to join the immediate family at the incineration. The number of people who wish to view the actual cremation is increasing in the Netherlands (Mathijssen 2016; see chapter 4), but it is only possible for a small group of people to do so. On the one hand, this is considered a very private moment. On the other, there is simply no space for a large number of people and safety regulations have to be taken into account. The elevated number of respondents who highly value witnessing the committal of the deceased should therefore be interpreted with care. Although people do consider it to be important, not all of our respondents were present at the actual incineration. We will further elaborate upon this in chapter 4.

To summarise, the results generally show positive values given to the different ritual actions. Anticipating this, we also asked our respondents to name the ritual action that had been most meaningful to them. People's responses show that meaning was most strongly taken from the personal speeches and remembrance (25% of respondents), from saying farewell to the deceased (22%), from the funeral as a whole (17%), from the presence of friends, family members, and others providing them comfort and support (11%), and, lastly, from the music (11%).

4 Mapping ritual actors

Our description of ritual actions has illustrated that various ritual actors are involved in the process of preparing and performing the funeral. Three groups of ritual actors can be distinguished: the deceased, the bereaved – the immediate family as well as the broader group of funeral participants – and the ritual experts. Here, we will discuss their roles in relation to the dynamics of the Dutch funerary landscape today.

4.1 The bereaved and the deceased

The bereaved and the deceased have taken centre stage in the preparation and performance of death ritual. Rather than religious tradition, the lives of the bereaved and the deceased have become the primal source and the starting point of the funeral preparations. Due to the changing role of religion, the traditional liturgical formats have become less self-evident, and the decisions made regarding the funeral ceremony are based upon the wishes of the deceased – often through the eyes of the bereaved (cf. Cook & Walter 2005). To conduct a religious ceremony has thus become a personal choice, being first and foremost grounded in the 'lifestyle' of the deceased and the bereaved (Davies 2015, 26).

In the funeral *preparations*, we can observe a shift in authority from ritual experts, traditionally the religious celebrant and the funeral director, to the bereaved. The wish to conduct a personal ceremony that celebrates and commemorates the life of the deceased has created greater scope for the bereaved in making decisions and in preparing ritual elements. However, in this respect the bereaved are not fully independent. Regardless of whether a religious tradition is involved, the preparation and creation of the funeral has become the joint task of the bereaved and the experts, although the spectrum for ritual re-invention can be demarcated by religious prescriptions and practical possibilities. Thus, although the bereaved make the ultimate decisions in terms of the type of funer-

al as well as its content, and hence have the final authority, they are guided by the ecclesial or non-ecclesial ritual expert and the funeral director who not only bring many suggestions and options to the table, but limits as well. The expertise, the frame of reference, and the preferences of the ritual experts influence choices and are important sources for the bereaved, whereas the narratives of the bereaved themselves are a fundamental starting point for the experts.

The changing role of religion and the individualisation of the funeral landscape have also influenced the roles of the bereaved and the deceased in the *performance* of the funeral. This can be observed in the actors performing the ritual actions, as well as in the actors who are being addressed in the ritual actions. The bereaved can decide to perform actions themselves, such as reading the eulogy, giving other speeches, reading scripture, lighting candles, reading a poem, playing an instrument, or intercede in prayer. Moreover, these elements can be performed by a variety of people, by means of which the heterogeneous group of funeral participants becomes involved. By having a diverse group of speakers, the social relationships of the deceased acquire a central position in the funeral. In the funerals that we observed, it was common for the dearest and nearest bereaved – children, parents, and spouses – to speak, but also common for those bereaved who had not helped prepare the funeral, but who had other fundamental relationships with the deceased, for instance, friends, colleagues, and neighbours, likewise to address the audience. Additionally, the bereaved not only enact ritual elements in contemporary funerals, but the dearest and nearest bereaved are also likely to lead the ceremony (see table 2.2). Not only do they make decisions regarding the preparations, but they increasingly manage and are in charge of the performance itself, under the guidance of experts.

The bereaved and the deceased are further referred to, in a dominant manner, in the ritual actions. Not only are they doing the talking, but we also observed that speakers address the deceased as well as other funeral participants in their speeches. They, for example, name someone referring to a memory or giving an anecdote, or they address people to show gratitude for certain things, such as taking care of the deceased during a period of illness. The deceased is often addressed to by name, by thanking him for things in life, by expressing the wish that the deceased is at peace, or by speaking about or towards the deceased in a direct manner. During the funeral of a young woman, for example, her husband said: "[…] you were telling me to calm down this morning, and urging me not to forget to feed the cat". Also, the use of the present tense is profound. Thus, to summarise, the bereaved and the deceased have acquired a cen-

TABLE 2.2 RITUAL EXPERTS LEADING THE FUNERAL PERFORMANCE

RITUAL EXPERT	ALL FUNERALS	ECCLESIAL	NON-ECCLESIAL
FUNERAL DIRECTOR	60	32	74
RELIGIOUS RITUAL EXPERT (PASTOR, PRIEST, MINISTER)	40	88	17
FAMILY	40	35	43
RITUAL COACH, INDEPENDENT FUNERAL SPEAKER	6	6	6
HUMANISTIC CELEBRANT	2	2	2

NOTE: NUMBERS IN PERCENTAGES, MULTIPLE RESPONSE SET. $N_{RESPONDENTS}$=196, N_{CASES}=291.

tral place in the preparation of the funeral, as well as in the performance. They not only actively prepare and enact ritual elements, but they have also become the main subject of the ceremony.

4.2 Ritual experts

As a result of the prominent involvement of the bereaved, ritual experts have acquired a different role in contemporary Dutch funerals, and the bereaved have taken on many of the qualities of ritual experts. As became clear in our description of ritual actions, several ritual experts are involved in preparing and conducting ecclesial and non-ecclesial funeral ceremonies: the funeral directors, the religious ritual experts, the 'independent' ritual coaches, the humanistic celebrants, and the bereaved themselves. Table 2.2 gives an overview of the experts who *led* the funeral ceremonies in which our survey respondents participated. We did not ask which actors performed a ritual element, but rather who was performing the funeral and who was in charge of the performance. The results point to several interesting dynamics as regards the changing role of religion and the individualisation of death ritual.

In the sample as a whole, we see that the family and the religious ritual expert are equally often identified as the actor leading the ceremony, which fur ther underlines the shift in authority. Furthermore, we see that six percent of funerals are led by a 'new' type of ritual expert, the so-called ritual coaches and independent funeral speakers or civil celebrants. Although humanistic celebrants are not new, they are closely related to the ritual coaches in the sense that they too offer an alternative for ecclesial experts. What these two groups of ritual experts have in common, is that they centralise the life of the deceased and the bereaved. Unlike religious ritual experts, who strive to find a balance between celebrating the life of the deceased and their own religious commitment,

the commemoration of the deceased's life often becomes *the* funeral when ritual coaches or humanistic celebrants are involved (cf. Holloway et al. 2013, 41). The difference here is that, at least officially, little or no room exists for 'God' in the humanistic funerals (cf. Engelke 2015), as the humanistic celebrants have a commitment to humanistic worldviews, whereas the 'independent' ritual experts can theoretically choose any framework they wish. The word independent is slightly misleading, however, as the ritual coaches also use particular frameworks, and have identities closely related to certain worldviews.

Although the immediate family has acquired greater scope in the preparation and performance of the funeral, the prominent role of the funeral director is not to be underestimated. Our results show that they have a major role in leading ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies, and in the preparation of the funeral we can observe a process of 'guided choices' (Holloway et al. 2013, 41), whereby not only the ritual coaches and religious experts, but also the funeral directors influence the decisions of the family. As the task of funeral directors is considered to be the facilitation of the ceremony, they mostly guide the family in practical arrangements. Our observations and interviews evidence that their main aim is to make the funeral process as smooth as possible, and to guide the family to the best of their abilities. In the latter sense, they also acquire a pastoral role (Holloway et al. 2013; Bailey 2010; Bremborg 2006; Lensing 2001).

Although the funeral director's emphasis on practical arrangements can be fruitful, it also poses challenges. Especially when the dearest and nearest bereaved are conducting the funeral themselves, it poses the question whether merely organising the funeral and providing care for the family is enough. Although the immediate family is often able to shape the story of the deceased's life, we observed that little knowledge exists regarding the purpose and function of ritual elements, and the implication of enacting or not enacting particular elements. The choice of a variety of speakers, for example, can occur naturally, but its impact in expressing the relationships and the identity of the deceased is generally not consciously reflected upon. In other words, the meaning of the funeral can be trivialised if the guidance of the funeral director does not fit with the knowledge and expertise of the family.

This can partly be ascribed to the funeral director's role as facilitator. During the arrangement interview, there is currently little room to discuss the meaning-making purposes of the funeral, and exploring certain ritual actions – and their impact on the bereaved – is often limited, neglected in view of practicalities and the other ritual experts involved, or discarded on the assumption

that a particular ritual action is not meaningful to the bereaved. Current examples of this are the inclusion of Christian elements in non-ecclesial funerals, as well as the viewing of the incineration in the case of a cremation. Such things can be discussed, but often they are not mentioned, assuming they do not fit in with the ideas of the particular family. Questions of religious meaning-making – in the broadest sense – often remain unvoiced when the family decides to have a non-ecclesial ceremony. Viewing the incineration is easily disregarded in light of the practicalities in the crematorium or, when it is discussed, its implications can remain unspoken. As one of our interviewees explained:

> [During the preparations with the ritual coach] she asked whether I wanted to witness and help place my brother in the cremation chamber […]. I said, of course I will not do that. [But] I had no idea of what lay ahead, of what was going to happen, of what she was asking me. In retrospect […] I really miss that piece now. I miss that piece of our life together […]. I didn't [guide] him till the end. (Yvonne, interview recently bereaved)

We do not claim that the funeral director should or should not elaborate upon all these elements. Rather, we wish to illustrate that when the role of the funeral director is marginalised in favour of the involvement and decisions of the immediate bereaved, this can lead to challenges, evoke ritual criticism, and demand a sensitivity of the funeral director towards the wishes and expertise of the immediate family.

Returning to table 2.2, two other things stood out in terms of ritual actors and the performance of ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals. First, our sample shows no differences regarding the new groups of ritual experts. This is surprising, as one would expect the number of ritual coaches to be higher in non-ecclesial ceremonies.[10] Second, it is interesting that in addition to the increased role of the bereaved, funeral directors mainly take over from religious ritual experts in non-ecclesial ceremonies. This shows that the most common alternative to a church funeral is a non-ecclesial ceremony led by the funeral director, often in co-operation with the family. This, combined with the lack of difference between ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies in relation to ritual coaches, suggests that in many funerals the role of the ritual expert is being minimalised to chairing the ceremony (cf. Schäfer 2011; cf. Bailey & Walter 2016).

[10] The ecclesial ceremony with a humanistic speaker seems, on the surface, peculiar, but this case involved a double ceremony, in church as well as in the crematorium, and the respondent, who had lost one of her ecclesial parents, described her own worldview as humanistic.

4.3 The emergence of ritual coaches

Table 2.2 illustrates the presence of a new group of ritual experts in the Dutch funerary landscape – ritual coaches.[11] These new ritual experts have answered people's quest for personalised funeral ceremonies. They have filled the void that opened as a result of the diminishing role of the churches, and the struggle of religious ritual experts, as well as funeral directors, to answer the demand for ritual creativity and meaning-making. Together with the bereaved, ritual coaches aim to create a meaningful, recognisable ceremony in view of the life of the deceased and the lives of the bereaved.

Although only six percent of the funerals of our survey respondents were led by a ritual coach, the emergence and existence of this group is having a major impact on the Dutch funerary landscape. In general, the emergence of new ritual experts has evoked questions about the roles of religious experts and funeral directors in the field. Some funeral enterprises, for example, have stimulated funeral directors to not only facilitate the ceremony, but also to lead the funeral in a more elaborate manner. Among liberal religious experts, that is, experts who are little bound by religious prescriptions, the question of why the bereaved choose a ritual coach in favour of a liberal religious expert plays a profound role. Furthermore, the emergence of ritual coaches has had a tremendous impact in particular regions of the Netherlands. The 'success' of ritual coaches strongly depends on the funeral companies being willing to provide the service of a ritual coach to the bereaved. During participant observations in the region of Arnhem-Nijmegen, for example, we conducted fieldwork at a funeral home where it had become common to involve ritual coaches. They were part of the wide range of services provided by the company. When we walked alongside at a funeral home in the region of Amsterdam, however, it was not at all common to involve a ritual coach.

When a ritual coach is drawn into the funeral process, he works closely together with the funeral director, but has a distinct role. Whereas the funeral directors facilitate the family in arranging all practical matters during the week before the funeral, they commonly do not focus on the content of the ceremony. Though some funeral enterprises are testing the boundaries between funeral di-

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[11] We have already encountered differences in terminology regarding the new group of ritual experts. In 2003, a group of students began training to become 'ritual coaches' (*ritueelbegeleider*) at Het Moment, which is why this particular term became prominent in the Dutch context. However, as not everyone identifies with this term different titles have emerged – such as civil celebrant, funeral coach, or funeral speaker (*woorddienstbegeleider, uitvaartspreker*).

rectors and ritual coaches, all of the funeral directors and ritual coaches that we interviewed, or walked alongside, identified with the notion that the job of ritual coach demands a very specific expertise, one that not everyone possesses. As a funeral director explained: "To capture a person's life in forty-five minutes requires particular skills". Sometimes, the difference is not that profound. This is not only because some funeral directors are motivated to become funeral speakers as well, but also because ritual coaches assist the family in making practical arrangements during the week, which often go hand in hand with the content and meaning of the funeral.

The collaboration between ritual coaches and funeral directors is fundamental to make the funeral process run smoothly, but it has its challenges. Whereas the funeral directors work for a funeral company, the ritual coaches are commonly self-employed entrepreneurs. However, the ritual coaches strongly rely on the funeral directors. In fact, in the initial arrangement interview it is the funeral director – rather than the bereaved – who influences the choice whether to involve a ritual expert and who makes arrangements for a particular expert. This in turn is influenced by the policy and attitudes of the funeral company towards ritual coaches in general. The emerging experts thus have to be visible and create a 'track record' in order to be considered and be assigned a family by the funeral directors.

On the basis of the interviews and participant observations with funeral directors, several considerations in choosing a ritual expert came to the fore. First, it is not simply a matter of rational choice, but largely one of feeling, they say. When discussing arrangements with the bereaved, the funeral director senses that a particular ritual coach would fit with the family. Second, the choice is based on the identity of the ritual coach, on his or her background and character. If the family, for instance, wishes to have a non-ecclesial funeral, but wants to include Christian elements, an expert is chosen with that expertise. If a child dies, other ritual coaches come to mind. When a family wants 'no fuss', someone is chosen who embodies that quality. A hesitant stance towards ritual coaches in general also plays a role. Third, motives behind choosing a ritual expert are not only based on his or her background, but also depend on past experiences. The earlier collaborations with a ritual coach help to decide whether the ritual coach is chosen again, creating room for ritual criticism. When there is a lack of empathy with the funeral director, or when there have been problems in the past, it becomes less likely that the ritual coach is booked. Lastly, there is the matter of finance. Unlike most religious experts, the family has to pay for

the ritual coach and each ritual coach has a different price tag, often ranging between 200 and 600 euros. The price of ritual coaches can also be a reason to opt for a humanistic celebrant, who centralises the life of the deceased for a smaller sum of money.

A further difficulty in the collaborations between, but also among, ritual coaches and funeral directors is the variety in attitudes regarding their function. Not only is there a diversity in backgrounds and specialities among ritual coaches, but funeral directors and ritual coaches have diverse opinions as to what their role is and should be. Should the role of the expert be as minimal as possible in the preparations? Does the ritual coach only conduct the ceremony? Is the expert simply the mouth-piece of the bereaved? And do they also have to guide the bereaved during the period of funeral preparations and the aftermath of the ceremony? Different stances to these questions result in challenges in practice. The most frequently heard criticism of ritual coaches and funeral directors towards some ritual coaches during our fieldwork, was that the ritual coaches were too involved and too attached to the bereaved, and were not as independent as they suggested being. At the same time, however, having a clearly defined identity as a ritual coach was much valued in practice, as it helped the funeral directors to choose a suitable expert for the particular family involved.

Lastly, the emergence of ritual coaches evokes the question of how they relate to the traditional ritual experts. In recent decades, we have seen that ritual coaches are fulfilling a role in addition to traditional pastors with an increased demand for ecclesial and non-ecclesial personal ceremonies (Venbrux, Altena & Peelen 2009). However, our observation of preparation interviews showed that the task of religious experts is strikingly similar to that of the ritual coaches. Religious experts also wish to create a ceremony that is recognisable and honours the life of the deceased and the lives of the bereaved, and they search for similar personal anecdotes and symbols. At the same time, however, their role differs in one fundamental way: not being independent they have a responsibility to take religious tradition into account.

It is with interest that we will consider the development of ritual coaches in the following decades. The regional differences in working with ritual coaches, and the fact that the bereaved are becoming more able to conduct funerals themselves, make the future of this group of ritual experts rather unpredictable.

4.3 The deceased: Between body and corpse

The deceased has a central place in the funeral preparations and performance: the ceremony is shaped in light of his identity, the deceased is both subject and audience at his own funeral, and – as we will see later – the funeral allows the bereaved to create a sense of continuity by transcending the life of the deceased. However, there is another form in which the deceased is to influence the funerary practices of the bereaved, namely, through his bodily presence. The body of the deceased is of great significance during the process of death ritual, and influences the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased (Hertz 1907/1960). Although the deceased may not enact like the living, his body is transitioning between being a person and a physical residue. As such, it evokes a demand for ritual meaning and ritual practice through which the bereaved can accept, challenge, and transcend the reality of death.

When biological death occurs, it is first and foremost the body that confronts the living with the reality of death: the deceased has passed away, and is no longer to be looked in the eyes or embraced. To many bereaved, the body has become an empty shell that once held the essence of the deceased. Accounts from our interviews with the recently bereaved clearly illustrate that a fundamental transition is experienced at the moment of death:

> It was good to be with her, the moment she passed away. But then you really loose her, you know. You can't say anything anymore […]. I was really… I couldn't hold her anymore. (Interview bereaved)
>
> My husband said: "I believe that when you die, you only really die when your soul leaves the body". And now I have clearly experienced that this is the case when someone dies. It is like… It is him all the time, and then suddenly he becomes a body. Well, how can you describe this? When he exhaled his last breath, I don't know, it is something typical. Like he suddenly left me. It was like he was only with me here, in my heart. (Interview bereaved)
>
> I wouldn't mind dying right now. I have seen how beautiful it is. He just died peacefully, and then there is nothing left. (Interview bereaved)

In confrontation with the prominent decomposing body, illustrating the reality of death and evoking a sense of danger and impurity, the bereaved intuitively experience a dualism between body and mind (Hertz 1907/1960; Bering 2002; 2006; Heflick et al. 2015). The notion that "it is him all the time, and then suddenly he becomes a body" shows how something, whether the soul, spirit, identity, or personhood, is irrevocably disappearing, and then there is "nothing left".

Simultaneously, however, an entity is left, the corpse, and something must be done with it. The corpse of the deceased, and we specifically use the term corpse over body in this instance, prompts a "cultured form of human response" (Davies 2015, 24). It is something to hide and disguise, but also something to grant privacy and respect (Foltyn 2008, 101). After death, the corpse becomes an object of solicitude (Hertz 1907/1960). It is washed and dressed by professionals and/or the bereaved, and by doing so its human-like qualities are restored (Howarth 1996, 147). The corpse is transformed into a body again, which comes to (re-)present the deceased individual. The body of the deceased thus mediates a connection between the living and the dead (Metcalf & Huntington 1979) and, as such, plays a fundamental role in the process of meaning-making, to which we will return in the next chapter.

5 Conclusion

By mapping the ritual actions and ritual actors in contemporary personalised funerals, this chapter has drawn attention to the impact of the changing role of religion and the process of individualisation on death ritual. Illustrating the diverse ways wherein Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors prepare and perform the funerals of their deceased has clarified the reinvention of personalised rites of passage, as well as the roles of the ritual actors that are involved.

Results from our participant observations and interviews have illustrated that the preparation of the funeral is fundamental in order to understand the structure and the meaning of the actual performance of the ceremony. During the 'arrangement week', we identified three key elements: the initial arrangement interview with the funeral director, the preparations in terms of the content of the funeral, and the practices in relation to the body of the deceased. During the arrangement interview, all practical matters with regard to the forthcoming arrangement week and the actual funeral performance are discussed. Most importantly, the bereaved have to decide upon the place, time, and type of funeral, and also have to make decisions regarding the involvement of other ritual experts, as well as the care that must be given to the body of the deceased. Although most decisions were deliberated upon among the bereaved themselves, in light of the wishes and the identity of their deceased, there was one particular element wherein the funeral director took a presiding role. The decision to involve another ritual expert – and also the particular person to be chosen – was strongly influenced by the funeral director. Whereas facilitation was empha-

sised during the arrangement interview, the choices being made also have a major impact on the ritual meaning of the funeral and, hence, on the meaning-making process of the bereaved, as we will further explore in the next chapter.

In relation to the preparations concerning the content of the ceremony, we have illustrated that both ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals are grounded in the life story of the deceased, as articulated by the bereaved. The immediate family either prepares the funeral themselves, whereby the proper guidance of the funeral director is indispensable, or co-creates the content with an ecclesial or non-ecclesial expert. In view of the funeral content, the life story is commonly seen as the glue that sticks the bereaved, as well as the diverse group of funeral participants, together. Both ecclesial and non-ecclesial experts have a large toolbox of ritual elements at their disposal to verbally and non-verbally portray the life story at the funeral. Thereby, the importance of persons, speeches, objects, and music came to the fore during all preparation interviews. The main difference between ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies is the existence of a liturgical format and the (expert's) additional commitment towards a religious tradition, which determine the extent to which the boundaries of the described or prescribed script can be interpreted, stretched and redefined. However, as we have emphasised, the ecclesial and non-ecclesial experts fulfil a similar role during the funeral preparations.

Subsequently, it was illustrated that the care for the body of the deceased is discussed in the arrangement interview with the funeral director, and that this topic was often the most revealing in terms of ritual meaning. In confrontation with the dead body, the bereaved not only experience that an irrevocable change has occurred in the psychical attributes of the deceased, but also with regards to their shared relationship with the deceased. The reality of death that is experienced in relation to the body is both reinforced and challenged by the fact that the body must be given care during the forthcoming week of funeral preparations. Therefore, we suggest that the liminal body mediates a connection and transition between the living and the dead and has an inestimable value in terms of meaning-making, which will be explored in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

The diverse preparation practices cumulate in the performance of the funeral. In relation to the ceremony itself, our survey results showed that the ritual actions through which the bereaved can celebrate the life of the deceased, particularly the speeches and pieces of music, together with the actions that allow the bereaved to pay their last respects, were considered the most important.

Also, the presence of other friends and relatives during the funeral was highly valued, granting the bereaved comfort and support and a sense of shared goals and values. This provides us with a starting point to further examine the meaning of the funeral performance.

In addition to the funeral preparations and performance, attention has been drawn to the changed roles of ritual actors in these practices. The rich funerary market that has emerged in the Netherlands has led to the rise of personalised ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals. In view of people's religious or non-religious presumptions, the choice for a particular type of funeral has become a personal preference. Hence, in the preparation of such personalised ceremonies, the authority has shifted away from ritual experts towards the bereaved. A process of co-creation or co-guidance occurs, whereby the bereaved ultimately decide upon the content and structure of the funeral, informed by the wishes of the deceased and the know-how of the ritual expert. When the bereaved prepare the funeral together with the funeral director, the latter becomes the only external expert to be relied upon, increasing his or her responsibility regarding the funeral content.

The content of funeral ceremonies thus is no longer the exclusive domain of religious celebrants as a new group of 'independent' ritual coaches has emerged, which has had a profound influence on the preparation and outlook of funerals, as well as on debates regarding ritual roles within the funeral industry. Although the impact of this group is not to be underestimated, our survey results suggest that it is particularly the funeral directors, together with the family, that take over the role of religious celebrants. In many non-ecclesial funerals, the role of the ritual expert has been reduced to chairing the ceremony, welcoming the funeral participants, keeping an eye on the bereaved and the time, and conveying gratitude and practical information at the end of the funeral. Religious celebrants have also experienced a reduction in their role, as a result of the active involvement of the bereaved. Thus, rather than making decisions in the name of the bereaved, the experts are merely guiding the bereaved through the funeral preparations and performance.

CHAPTER 3

PERFORMANCES OF SYMBOLIC IMMORTALITY

MEANING-MAKING IN PERSONALISED FUNERALS

By preparing and performing funerary practices, the bereaved are managing their confrontation with death. The flood of emotions, the tear in the social fabric, and the decomposing corpse not only evoke the need for ritual practice, but also awaken a quest for ritual meaning. Wishing to do justice to the identity of the deceased and aspiring to say goodbye in a 'good' way, the bereaved seek and co-create meaning through funeralising, and through the performance of the funeral ceremony itself. Shaping and enacting a variety of ritual actions, both front- and backstage, not only enables the bereaved to regain a sense of control but, moreover, allows them to symbolically conquer death by regenerating life (Bloch & Parry 1982). To illustrate this, we will describe the meaning-making process enacted during the funeral preparations and funeral performance, from the perspectives of the bereaved and the ritual experts. Thereby, this chapter builds further upon the aforementioned description of ritual actions and ritual actors.[1] Again, we use the framework of mapping ritual elements (Grimes 2014) to answer the following research question: *What ritual elements are significant to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the preparation and the performance of the funeral?'*

By drawing attention to the key concepts, this chapter will, first of all, situate itself in the overall framework of the study (§2). After briefly describing the methodology (§3), we will then focus on the meaning-making practices of the recently bereaved (§4). Following this, we will continue from where we left off our discussion in the previous chapter: the body of the deceased (§4.1). Subsequently, we will examine the ways wherein the bereaved seek and create meaning by looking at the motivations that underlie their choices made during the funeral preparations (§4.2). Furthermore, attention will be given to the meaning that the bereaved wish to express during the funeral (§4.3). Although many scholars have studied the emergence of personalised funerary practices, what the notion of 'personal' in 'personal funeral' *means* to Dutch bereaved

[1] Parts of this chapter were published in *Jaarboek voor liturgieonderzoek/Yearbook for liturgical and ritual studies* (Mathijssen 2013a) and the volume *Changing European Death Ways* (Mathijssen 2013b).

people has barely been reflected upon (cf. Garces-Foley & Holcomb 2005; cf. Holloway et al. 2013). Therefore, we will draw attention to the purpose of contemporary personalised funerals in the Netherlands and will argue that funerals today function as collective performances of symbolic immortality (§4.4), which will be illustrated by examples from our fieldwork (§4.5). We will conclude with an overview of this chapter in relation to ritual meaning (§5).

1 Key concepts: Ritual meaning

The concept of ritual meaning provides us with another way of understanding funeral preparation and performance. We will examine the *process* of meaning-making, as briefly hinted upon in the introduction, and we will also study the *content* of personalised funerals that emerges from this process. Again, the framework of mapping ritual elements has been adjusted to the particular research questions involved (Figure 3.1).

1.1 The meaning-making process

Meaning-making is a fundamental aspect in the arrangement, the performance, and the aftermath of the funeral. By creating a 'meaningful' funeral, the bereaved are managing the transition to a new relationship with their departed loved one. Studying meaning-making in funerals, Holloway et al. observed a three-stage process whereby meaning is brought about: meaning-seeking, meaning-creating, and meaning-taking (2013, 44–46; Neimeyer 2001). The bereaved seek meaning by making particular choices during the preparation of the funeral in order to celebrate and convey the essence of the life of the deceased, and to manage their changing relationship with the deceased. The choices made by the bereaved are facilitated by the funeral directors and/or the ritual experts, and translate into the performance of the ceremony. Through this process of co-creation (cf. Kelly 2008, 66), the choices of the family are not only operationalised, but also lifted to a higher level of symbolic meaning (Turner 1973). This, for instance, occurs by giving voice to beliefs, by creating a sense of immortality, or by expressing ongoing relationships between the living and the dead. Lastly, after the funeral, the bereaved reflect upon the things that they have taken away from the ceremony, things that have been meaningful to them.

It must be briefly noted that the boundaries between these three facets of meaning-making are not always clear. The bereaved, for instance, also take meaning from the funeral preparations, and seek meaning in the period of be-

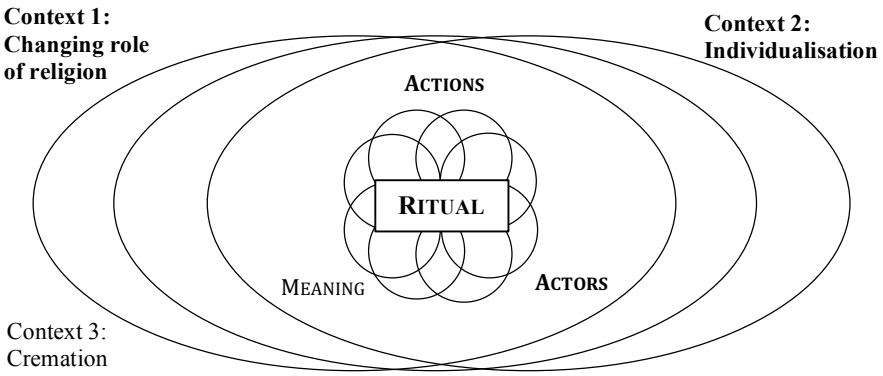

FIGURE 3.1 ELEMENTS OF RITUAL, BASED ON RONALD GRIMES

reavement. At the same time, meaning-taking can be prevented during the preparations and the performance of the funeral itself, as people are often ambiguously aware and numb towards all that is happening.

1.2 Situational belief, symbolic immortality & continuing bonds

The funeral's structure and meaning emerge as a result of meaning-seeking and meaning-creating. In the funeral, meaning can be expressed in, and can be taken from, a variety of situational beliefs. Such beliefs are shaped in diverse symbolic forms – like images, narratives, music, and people – in view of the context and situation at hand. The expression of situational beliefs can thus be understood as an outcome of the process of making sense of life and death. Situational beliefs, hence, are, in the understanding that meaning can be taken from them, secondary to meaning-making itself. In the process of meaning-making, some meanings become dominant and are expressed as situational beliefs through ritual symbols, whereas other meanings remain hidden (Turner 1973). In light of our key concepts, we will look at two types of situational beliefs in this chapter: expressions of symbolic immortality and notions of continuing bonds. Thereby, we will focus on the care that is given to the body of the deceased, the funeral arrangements, and the funeral ceremony.

1.3 Research questions

In terms of ritual meaning, we are thus interested in the meaning-making process and in the structure and meaning of situational beliefs. In relation to the care that is given to the body of the deceased during the week of the funeral preparations, we will examine what ritual actions surrounding the dead body

can reveal about the meaning-making of the bereaved, and of funeral professionals. Considering the preparation of the funeral ceremony, we will study what the choices of the bereaved, specifically the motives underlying their choices, can reveal about the meaning they are seeking in the funeral.[2] Furthermore, we will explore what types of meaning should be expressed in the ritual actions of the funeral, according to the bereaved. Regarding the funeral performance, we will draw attention to the purpose and function of the funeral ceremony. Moreover, we are interested in the ways wherein the purpose and function of the funeral are translated to, and expressed in, the ritual structure and content of the ceremony.

2 Methods

As in the previous chapter, the mapping of funeral preparations and funeral performances is based on our participant observations, observations of funeral ceremonies, interviews with ritual experts, interviews with recently bereaved people, and the survey research carried out among the recently bereaved. The results from different methods provide different perspectives on the ritual performance. As we have already discussed our qualitative methods in the introduction, we will only draw attention here to the measurement instruments and data analysis concerning our quantitative study.

2.1 Measurement instruments and data analysis

In relation to the survey research, some remarks must be made regarding the measurement instruments and data analysis. Based on our participant observations, we formulated nine motives that could have influenced the choices of the bereaved during the funeral arrangements. We asked our respondents to indicate to what extent they felt these motives played a role using a five-point system (1=not at all, 5=very much). After examining the overall motives of respondents, we conducted bivariate analyses between social-religious characteristics and religious motives to further explore differences in terms of religious affiliation and religiosity.

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[2] We should question whether people really *seek* meaning in the process of funeralising, and in the funeral itself. During our participant observations of funeral arrangements, this was not explicitly and consciously mentioned or reflected upon. The funeral process is not only a period wherein people create ritual elements, but it is also a period of transition that people *undergo*. Still, however, we could observe various motivations, values, purposes, and beliefs behind practices. Also, people expressed concerns regarding a meaningful, beautiful, or fitting funeral in view of themselves and, moreover, in view of others. Therefore, we argue that the question of how people seek meaning in the funeral process is highly relevant.

Second, as we were interested in the meanings that the dearest and nearest bereaved wished to express during their funerals, we included statements in the questionnaire regarding the meaning of the funeral itself. Grounded in our qualitative fieldwork, we thereby focused on the identity of the deceased and the meaning of the deceased in a broader sense. Three statements were included that referred to the celebration of the life of the deceased, three statements that emphasised the meaning of the life of the deceased in a social sense, and three statements that pointed to the meaning of the deceased's life in a transcendent sense, expressing hope, faith, and the faith of the deceased. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree). In terms of data analysis, we conducted a factor analysis (appendix F) to explore what types of meaning can be distinguished in funerals and to examine to what extent people identified with these types of meaning. Lastly, we conducted bivariate analyses between the dimensions that could be distinguished in the factor analysis and some pe sonal and funeral characteristics, in order to explore the variation in attitudes towards meaning in funerals among the bereaved. [3]

3 Mapping ritual meaning

During the remainder of this chapter, we will study the meaning-making process at play during the preparation and performance of the funeral. First, we will look behind the scenes and examine situational beliefs in relation to the dead body, based on our interviews and participant observations. Second, we will explore what meaning is sought during the funeral preparations by examining the key motives of our survey respondents in the process of funeralising. We will

[3] Because of the multidisciplinary approach of this study, it must be briefly explained what factor analyses and bivariate analyses do. Through factor analyses, we can explore whether and what variables cluster and together form a more complex concept. This then allows us to explain people's attitudes towards such complex concepts. Thus, if one would argue that meaning in funerals is personal, we can study what such a concept entails according to the respondents. Does the notion of 'personal', for instance, mean an emphasis on personal characteristics of the deceased in the funeral, or does 'personal' also include an emphasis on the social meaning and accomplishments of the deceased? Do people make a distinction between these two aspects, or do they belong together? Looking at more complex variables that result from factor analyses does more justice to the complexity of everyday life compared to single items.
Bivariate analyses have a different function. They allow us to explore whether different variables are related to one another. This does not refer to the clustering of variables in more complex concepts, though a very high correlation suggests that two variables measure the same thing. Rather, it allows us to, for instance, explore whether older people agree more with traditional afterlife beliefs than younger people. An important limitation of bivariate analyses is that they do not explain the relationship. Thus, on the basis of such an analysis, we can only say that older people agree more with traditional beliefs, but not that they do so because they are older. Other factors may play a role, such as church membership or religiosity. If we want to study explanations or predictions, we subsequently must use regression analyses. We will return to these in chapter six.

further use our quantitative data to examine what meaning must be expressed during the funeral, according to the wishes of the bereaved. Following this, we will draw attention to the purpose and function of the funeral, and to the ways in which this is translated in the ceremony. Based on our (participant) observations and interviews, we will look at expressions of symbolic immortality in personalised funerals in particular.

3.1 The body of the deceased

The body of the deceased plays a profound role in meaning-making practices in the face of death. In chapter two we have shown that the care for the body is discussed in the arrangement interview between the funeral director and the family. In these talks we observed the importance of restoring and/or conveying the deceased's identity, whereby aspects of meaning-making came to the fore. By taking care of the body, the bereaved, as well as the professionals, shape and preserve, in a literal and metaphorical sense, aspects of the identity of the deceased. During one interview, for example, the widow firmly stressed that her late husband not only needed his clothes, but also his glasses as "Without his glasses, it just [wasn't] him". In another instance, we visited a man whose mother had passed away. His mother had always looked refined, wearing beautiful clothes, and having immaculate hair and make-up, until she had suffered a stroke a few years back. Since then she had been unable to care for her appearance as much, and had only continued to wear a particular colour of nail polish. In making arrangements, not only did the family insist that that particular shade of nail polish had to be found somewhere, but they also wanted to dress her as she used to dress herself, before she fell ill. Thus, by dressing the dead both the reality of death, as well as the process of dying, are challenged.

These two examples show that appearance plays a major role in restoring the identity of the deceased. Meaning is sought by humanising the corpse, whereby human-like qualities of the deceased are restored and the corpse is treated as if it is a living human being, allowing people to create a sense of continuity in response to death's discontinuity.[4] Additionally, the senses of the deceased are often taken into account in this process. During an arrangement interview with two daughters, whose mother had just passed away, we discussed

[4] This notion of humanising the deceased is not only found in the treatment of the corpse, but also becomes apparent in the way the buried or cremated remains are cared for. The grave is decorated, often resembling aspects of the home and the social life of the deceased. Also, as we will see in chapter four, the ashes are treated as if they are animate.

the clothes that their mother would wear. Her favourite blue dress and jewellery were easily picked, but when the funeral director added that their mother also needed her undergarments, something interesting occurred in the talk between the daughters. It had to be something pretty but, more importantly, it needed to be something comfortable, something "with a good fit, which feels soft on her skin". This notion was further intensified when we came to discuss the place where their mother would stay until the day of the funeral. The daughters did not want to leave her all by herself, but neither did they wish to place her in a cooled room with the other dead. "I would like a private room for mum, as she doesn't like people," one of the daughters explained. Therefore, it was decided to rent a private 'mourning-chamber' in the funeral home, which granted the family 24/7 access. In this instance the corpse of their mother is not only humanised, but in the process of taking care of her we can observe an emphasis on her sensory attributes and personal preferences. Whereas accounts of the moment of death illustrate the departure of the soul or spirit in relation to the body, here, an intentional psychology is attributed to the dead body, implying that the dead body has a form of consciousness within (Harper 2010, 317). Thereby, the woman's lifestyle becomes a source of moral obligation in making decisions regarding the care for her body (Hertz 1907/1960; Davies 2000, 98). Not only is an image of the deceased created, but a form of physical presence is also established (Howarth 1996).

Restoring the human-like qualities of the body consequentially has an impact on people's relationship with the deceased and evokes notions of symbolic immortality. Howarth (1996) has illustrated how the created image may continue to live on in the minds of survivors and, as such, evokes a form of, what she calls, psychological immortality. Although we must question the extent to which the humanised corpse continues to influence images of the bereaved concerning the deceased, in relation to other memories that establish such an image, the act of humanising the corpse and its result, the human-like dead body, influence situational notions of continued existence. In the actual response to the dead body, it is not only the created immaterial image that continues to be meaningful for people, but particularly the handling of the body itself. In caring for the physical body of the deceased, it becomes a vehicle for implicit and explicit notions of continued existence, or lack thereof. One of our interviewees, for instance, told us about the ways in which he and his children had dressed his wife and brought her home before the ceremony took place:

> [After she had passed away] we placed her in the living room. Yes, like she was part of it. In that way, you can keep her close, although her soul is gone. I didn't really talk to her. Yes, I'd kiss her, but … And also for the children. It looked very warm and cosy. They came over and could sit with mum. (Charles, interview recently bereaved)

Charles' account shows a distinction between body and soul, but we simultaneously see that the body of the deceased keeps 'mum' in near proximity. Although the soul "is gone" the body of the deceased is treated as if it represents the deceased in the fullest sense. Charles is not speaking of the body, but of 'her', and the children came to sit with 'mum', which was something they had always done during life. So through the body, 'mum' continues to have ties with the living and their everyday world (Hertz 1907/1960). In ascribing awareness to the body in practice and in the experience of the body as soulless, the liminal qualities of the deceased are emphasised. It furthermore suggests a situational belief in something beyond death, as Charles' account indicates both an instant and gradual departure of the deceased. As such, it evidences 'doing belief' (Day 2010). When we explicitly came to speak of life after death in the interview, Charles, although making use of traditional vocabulary when referring to the departure of his wife's soul, firmly disagreed with traditional notions of life after death. In this particular situation concerning her body, however, meaning is taken from a notion of ongoing existence and gradual departure. This highlights the importance of the social location of belief, and illuminates that a variety of situational beliefs can emerge in diverse contexts, both in practices as well as in narratives.

Our material also evidences situational beliefs in relation to disagreement with a continued form of existence. During an arrangement interview in the region of Amsterdam, we met a man whose brother had passed away. In a specific way this interview was very different from others in which we had participated, as the family opted for a technical cremation. They did not want to have a funeral ceremony, neither did they wish to view the body, arrange a viewing for others, participate in taking care of the body, organise a coffee-table, or send cards. Technical cremations can take place for various reasons, and they are often related to situations with family disputes, the absence of family, or funerary costs. However, none of these had occurred in this case. Rather, the technical cremation reflected the funeral wishes and identity of both the deceased as well as the bereaved. It was their form of a personal funeral: "Death is death, no fuss."

The idea that there was nothing after death, and that things instantaneously ended once the brother had exhaled his last breath, influenced the funeral and the care for the body. The family had already had the opportunity to say goodbye in the hospital, and "so had his friends if they had wanted to". As "no one [would] be viewing the body", the family told us that he did not have to be dressed in a particular way, but could wear the hospital clothes he was already wearing. Also, the notion that a coffin was needed to cremate the deceased was considered "a waste of wood". All these notions show how the body was merely being viewed as a residue. To the family the body was no longer connected to their brother, but was an entity that had to be taken care of in a practical sense. This case, therefore, further suggests that the ways in which people take care of the body of their deceased can point towards their situational beliefs regarding life after death, as handling the body in this instance points towards the idea that death is the end.

The dead body is not only a symbol that represents and participates in the identity of the deceased, that keeps the 'soul' attached to this world, or that illuminates its departure, nor is it simply a source for continuing or discontinuing relationships between the living and the dead. Being a carrier of multiple meanings (Turner 1967, 28), because of which it can *be* different things (Harper 2010, 311), the body also symbolises the core cultural values of a 'society' (Davies 2015, 5). This clearly came to the fore in the responses of funeral professionals in the case of the technical cremation. The family's wish to not do anything with the body was responded to by the funeral director saying that "we then will only give him basic care, and we will make sure your brother's body is allowed to rest". In this way, not caring for the body was transformed into caring for the body.

Regarding the above case, after the arrangement interview we went to the morgue to see whether the deceased had been retrieved from the hospital and whether everything had been arranged properly. In the morgue, it turned out things had not been put in order. Because of his illness, the deceased was not in good shape and his clothes from the hospital had already been removed. Whereas the family had said the clothes did not matter, as no one would be viewing the deceased, the actual situation in the morgue, which generally remains hidden from the bereaved, demanded a response. The two mortuary technicians strongly emphasised that they "could not leave the deceased lying like this", and that they would wash him and place him in a burial shroud in the coffin. Again, the corpse demanded a "cultured form of human response" (Davies 2015, 24).

Caring for the corpse was not simply a matter of hygiene but, in this instance, neither was it about restoring the individual identity of the deceased. Rather, the way the body was taken care of reflected the core value of dignity. This notion of dignity, expressed and enacted upon by taking care of the corpse, is the most profound in the practice of taking care of the body of the deceased. It reflects what is considered honourable by the bereaved, the deceased – when he has stated this during his lifetime, or what the bereaved think the deceased would consider dignified or fitting – and the professionals. For some this value ensures that the deceased's appearance is restored, whereas for others it implies leaving the body as it is. The way in which expression is given to dignity thus evidences people's notions about the meaning of death.

3.2 Meaningful motives in the funeral preparations

Meaning is actively sought by the bereaved during the funeral arrangements, in co-operation with ritual experts, influencing the period before the actual ceremony, as well as the structure, meaning, and aftermath of the funeral itself. In other words, meaning-seeking and meaning-creating are important factors in shaping death ritual (cf. Holloway et al. 2013). By looking at the motives that influenced the choices of the survey respondents whilst preparing the funeral, we aim to illustrate what meaning they were seeking. On the basis of the participant observations and interviews, we formulated nine motives in view of the arrangements of the ceremony, and asked our survey respondents to what extent these motives had influenced their choices whilst preparing the funeral (Table 3.1). These motives thus illustrate what most strongly influenced the funeral preparations and, as such, illuminate people's notions of what constitutes a 'good' funeral. This provides us with a starting point to later examine the pur-

TABLE 3.1 MOTIVES BEHIND FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

CHOICES MADE IN VIEW OF	MEAN (SD)
DECEASED'S WISHES	4.5 (.82)
PERSONALISED CEREMONY	4.3 (.92)
SELF-EVIDENT	4.2 (.86)
LIFESTYLE OF BEREAVED AND DECEASED	4.1 (.91)
LOCATION	2.9 (1.23)
RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY/BELONGING	2.8 (1.60)
NON-RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW	2.5 (1.33)
BELIEF, FAITH	2.4 (1.43)
RITUAL EXPERT	2.1 (1.13)

NOTE: N=198

pose and function of the 'personalised' funeral, as well as the ritual meaning imbued in the ceremony.

The most important factor in making decisions regarding the type and content of the funeral were the *wishes of the deceased*. This was true for the Roman Catholic (M=4.5, SD=.86), Protestant (M=4.4, SD=.76), and the religiously unaffiliated bereaved (M=4.5, SD=.86). Three other motives, closely related, also highly influenced the decisions of the bereaved: they wished to create a personalised funeral ceremony; to them it was self-evident to shape the funeral in the way they had done; and the funeral had to fit in with their own and the deceased's lifestyle. When we differentiate in terms of religious or non-religious affiliation, these three motives remain at the top of the list. It shows the importance for the bereaved to create and perform a funeral that suits their lifestyle and that corresponds with the wishes and identity of the deceased.

Religious motivations influenced the decisions of the bereaved in a less homogenous way. As the table above indicates, whether the deceased belonged to a religious community was not a decisive motivation in the choices made during the funeral arrangements, and neither was the belief system of the deceased or the bereaved. Having a non-religious worldview also wasn't decisive in the whole sample. However, as one would expect, it is revealing to differentiate on the basis of religious affiliation and religiosity.

Roman Catholics show neutral attitudes towards the motive of religious belonging (M=3.0, SD=1.49), as well as to the beliefs of the deceased and their own beliefs (M=2.6, SD=1.36). However, the more they identify with being religious, the more important these motives become ($r_{community}$=.34, p<.05; r_{belief}=.43, p<.001). Having a non-religious worldview did not strongly influence the choices of the Roman Catholic affiliated respondents (M=2.3, SD=1.17). The results showed a negative, but non-significant, correlation between religiosity and non-religious worldviews ($r_{non\text{-}religious}$=-.21, p=0.06).

For Protestant respondents, religious belonging and beliefs are, in general, more important ($M_{community}$=4.1, SD=1.23; M_{belief}= M=3.8, SD=1.34). As with the Roman Catholics, the more respondents identify with being religious, the more important these motives become ($r_{community}$=.32, p=.08; r_{belief}=.40, p<.05). They did not identify with the non-religious worldview motive (M=1.6, SD=.84) and this increased, though not significantly, when people considered themselves to be religious to a larger extent ($r_{non\text{-}religious}$=-.34, p=.07). This corresponds with earlier research that has shown that Protestants have a stronger re-

ligious identity in terms of religious belief and religious belonging (Wojtkowiak 2011, 60).

For the religiously unaffiliated respondents, the role of the religious community (M=2.1, SD=1.49) and belief (M=1.7, SD=1.05) are marginal. Again, they acquire greater importance in the process of preparing the funeral when respondents consider themselves to be more religious ($r_{community}$=.44, p<.001; r_{belief}=.27, p<.05). Interestingly, having a non-religious worldview was a moderate motive (M=3.1, SD=1.38), although the less people identified with being religious, the more people identified with this motive ($r_{non\text{-}religious}$=.29, p<.05).

Moreover, in all three groups we see that religious belonging ($r_{community}$=.61, p<.001) and religious belief (r_{belief}=.49, p<.001) become more important when it was of significance to the deceased. The same is true for the motive of a non-religious worldview. This becomes more important when the deceased was religiously unaffiliated ($r_{non\text{-}religious}$=.48, p<.001). These results confirm what we have observed in our participant observations, namely, that the funeral is shaped by the life and identity of the deceased, both in ecclesial and non-ecclesial ceremonies. Furthermore, it strongly corresponds with earlier research showing that the bereaved make choices to celebrate the life of the deceased and to convey the essence of his life (Holloway et al. 2013, 44). Thus, having a personalised and ecclesial ceremony do not contradict one another.

Neither choosing a particular *ritual expert* nor a specific *location* were at the top of the list of motives. We suggest that two main explanations can be given for this. First, the ritual expert and location of the funeral are, in most cases, not 'chosen'. When the funeral is arranged, it is often self-evident to have a ceremony in a nearby crematorium hall, in the case of a cremation or a non-ecclesial ceremony, or in the church to which the deceased belonged. People also use other locations, and the funerary industry is currently creating more spaces to conduct ceremonies, but this is not the dominant practice at the moment.[5] In relation to the ritual expert the same is true. Our observations showed that the choice of ritual expert is strongly influenced by the funeral director and by the type of funeral that is chosen. Furthermore, there is often no intimate connection between the ritual expert and the bereaved in their everyday lives.

[5] Recent examples are of the former monastery Mariënhage in Eindhoven, which in coming years will be restored and refurbished, and used for funerals, as well as weddings and other ceremonies, and the Memoriam in Arnhem, a former Roman-Catholic Church, that has been transformed into a funeral home, including mourning chambers, an auditorium, an urn crypt, and a columbarium.

Choosing a particular ritual expert, a person rather than a 'type', is likely to become more important when a social connection exists in everyday life, or when there is a past relationship, for example, through another funeral that has been performed by the expert. It is, however, fascinating that the ritual expert is not identified as a decisive motive, as this choice highly influences the funeral ceremony in terms of character and authenticity (Bailey & Walter 2016). For those present at the funeral, meaning is not only taken from what is said and how it is said, but also by whom it is said. This is not restricted to the diverse group of funeral participants who are able to speak during the funeral, but also includes the ritual expert.

3.3 Expressing personal and transpersonal meaning in funerals

In making choices for the funeral, our survey results showed that the bereaved aim to create a personalised funeral, following the wishes of the deceased and fitting in with their own lifestyle. When there is a religious lifestyle, the role of religion in the funeral becomes more important in terms of meaning-making. By picking, mixing, and re-inventing ritual elements, the bereaved are able to shape and convey the essence of the life of the deceased – from their perspective. A personalised funeral is thus not simply about the picking and mixing itself, but rather about the meaning that results from this picking and mixing.

This understanding of personalised funerals raises the question of the meaning that should be expressed through the ritual performance. What does the essence of the life of the deceased entail, and how does this relate to the bereaved participating in the funeral? To further grasp the meaning of personalised funerals, we formulated nine statements regarding the meaning that should be expressed in the funeral, and asked our respondents to what extent they

TABLE 3.2. DIMENSIONS OF MEANING IN FUNERALS

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTION	MEAN (SD)
PERSONAL MEANING	PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECEASED – WHO HE WAS, WHAT HE HAS MEANT FOR OTHERS AND FOR SOCIETY – SHOULD BE CONVEYED DURING THE FUNERAL	4.3 (.58)
TRANSPERSONAL MEANING	THE FAITH OF THE DECEASED AND THE BELIEF IN GOD SHOULD BE EXPRESSED DURING THE CEREMONY	3.0 (1.20)

NOTE: N=191

agreed with the statements. Table 3.2 gives an overview of the two factors that could be distinguished in the analysis (appendix F).

The items on the 'personal meaning' scale (α.83), with which respondents highly agree, refer to the importance of conveying the essence of the deceased's life, and expressing the mark that he or she has left on others. The clustering of the individual items, referring to the person of the deceased, and the social items, referring to what the deceased has meant to a larger group of people, illustrates that the celebration of the life of the deceased cannot be separated from the meaning of the life of the deceased in a broader sense. To convey the essence of the deceased's life is to convey both his personal characteristics or identity, as well as his relationships. The items on the 'transpersonal meaning' scale (α.88), with which respondents identified inconclusively, refer to the expression of the meaning of the life of the deceased in a religious sense.

Following the factor analysis, we conducted two bivariate analyses to explore associations with some personal and funeral characteristics (Table 3.3). In relation to personal meaning, two weak significant associations were found. People who had lost their partner emphasised the importance of personal meaning more than people who had lost their parent. Personal meaning was also more strongly emphasised by women in comparison to men. In relation to transpersonal meaning, we found a very high correlation with religiosity. The more people identify with being religious, the more important the expression of faith in the funeral becomes. In terms of religious belonging, the results showed no significant and relevant differences between Roman Catholic and religiously unaffiliated respondents. The results among Roman Catholics showed a neutral stance towards the expression of transpersonal meaning (M=3.0, SD=1.08), and the religiously unaffiliated did not identify with the importance of transpersonal meaning (M=2.6, SD=1.15). The bivariate analysis shows a significant and relevant difference between Protestant and religiously unaffiliated respondents and, therefore, also between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Transpersonal meaning was highly valued among Protestant respondents (M=4.1, SD=.96). Furthermore, transpersonal meaning was more strongly identified with in ecclesial ceremonies, compared to non-ecclesial ones, and in burials, compared to cremations. Lastly, the Protestant lifestyle of the deceased strongly influences the importance of transpersonal meaning in the funeral. In relation to this, the results also show a weak positive association between losing a parent, compared to a partner.

TABLE 3.3 SOCIAL LOCATION OF MEANING IN FUNERALS. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL, FUNERAL-TYPE, DISPOSAL-TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, RELATIONSHIP; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) BETWEEN PERSONAL AND TRANSPERSONAL MEANING AND SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	PERSONAL	TRANSPERSONAL
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
SEX (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.20**	-.11
AGE	.09	.14
EDUCATION	-.11	.09
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.07	.01
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.11	.39***
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.03	.07
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.09	.41**
RELIGIOSITY	-.00	.62***
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.04	.51***
TYPE OF BODILY DISPOSAL (CREMATION VS. BURIAL)	.02	-.48***
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.24**	-.16*

NOTE: ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

3.4 The purpose and function of personalised funerals

The bereaved seek and co-create meaning in funerals together with the ritual experts. Grounded in the wishes of the deceased and their own lifestyle, they most strongly shape and convey 'personal meaning', which can also have religious connotations. Emphasising personal meaning implies that not only the characteristics of the deceased are remembered, but that the meaning of his life, in view of his relationships and the wider social context, are celebrated as well. This subsequently has an impact on the meaning that the bereaved take from the ritual performance and illuminates the purpose and function of contemporary personalised funerals.

Much research has elaborated on the purpose and function of funerals today. In addition to celebrating the life of the deceased, the funeral is seen as an event that allows people to say farewell, provides comfort and support, and presents permission to move on (Holloway et al. 2013).[6] Taking into account

[6] As in earlier research (Holloway et al. 2013; Quartier 2007) these functions of the funeral also came to the fore in the material of this study. As can be seen in the questionnaire (appendix C, question 16), we for instance looked at spontaneous, normative, and ideological experiences of communitas among the bereaved

the importance of both the recognisability, as well as the symbolic meaning, of ritual (Turner 1973), which intertwined in our 'personal-meaning' scale, this can be pressed further. We suggest that contemporary Dutch funerals can be understood as a collective performance of symbolic immortality, whereby people create meaning that celebrates and transcends the individuality of life, and embrace the continuity of life without denying death (Lifton & Olson 2004, 33–39). The meaning imbued in ritual actions not merely reflects the essence of the deceased and his past relationships, but also enables people to reflect upon the meaning of the deceased in their own ongoing lives (cf. Holloway et al. 2013). By emphasising the continuity of the deceased and the ongoing value of his relationships, the funeral becomes a symbolic conquest of death, speaking 'words against death' (Davies 2002; Bailey & Walter 2016).

In the preparation and performance of the funeral, as well as in the everyday lives of the bereaved, cultural forms are created through which the dead are separated from, but simultaneously continue to be attached to, the world of the living. This occurs during the funeral preparation, for example, in relation to the dead body as we have illustrated, but also becomes visible in the funeral itself and its aftermath. We will emphasise the qualities of the funeral as a collective performance of symbolic immortality by illustrating the ways wherein immortality is expressed in the ceremony. As we will describe in the following chapters, these expressions of symbolic immortality in the funeral are also of great importance during the period of bereavement, creating a basis for continuing relationships with the dead (Klass et al. 1996).

3.5 Performing symbolic immortality in funerals

Symbolic immortality is expressed in the meaning and structure of the funeral ceremony. We will therefore look at both aspects of the five dimensions of symbolic immortality: theological, biological, creative, material, and natural (Lifton & Olson 1974). For reasons explained in the introduction, the experiential mode will be excluded.

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respondents (Turner 1969). The factor analysis did not extract different dimensions, but resulted in the clustering of all items (α.91). The results of the Reliability Analysis show that people found comfort and support in the experience of shared comradeship during the ceremony, and also experienced a strong sense of shared goals and values with those present (M=4.2, SD=.61).

3.5.1 Theological immortality

In the preparation and performance of the funeral, the *theological mode of symbolic immortality* comes into play, whereby the deceased is connected to the principle of eternity via religious images, that is, images being identified as Christian. In relation to death, the most evident expression of theological symbolic immortality is the belief in an afterlife. Classical notions are those of eternal life, the eternal soul and – although to a much lesser extent – the resurrection of the body, spoken of and enacted upon in various elements of the funeral.[7] This not only includes traditional elements, like prayer, but the notion of an eternal principle is also expressed in other symbols, such as light, which by some are identified as being Christian. Moreover, the expression of theological immortality is not restricted to ecclesial ceremonies, but also comes to the fore in non-ecclesial ceremonies with a 'Christian touch':

> When I burn incense and sprinkle the body with water [in non-ecclesial ceremonies], I always explain this and push the boundaries of tradition. The blessing with water, for instance, refers to baptism in church. I elaborate upon this, in the sense that all human life emerges from water in the world. […] I use the water to symbolise rebirth. (Interview ritual coach)

Eschatological symbolism can thus be expressed in various ways and in different ritual actions. In today's individualised funerals, it is commonly related to the lives and faith of those present. Rather than "following a beaten track, and quoting an authoritative source" (Cook & Walter 2005, 371), Christian images of symbolic immortality are shaped and re-imagined in view of the bereaved, the deceased, and the heterogeneous group of funeral participants:

> Religious matters must be expressed, but related to the deceased so they have meaning for all funeral attendants. I am not leading the funeral to proclaim my own faith. I do not preach; that is part of the Sunday ceremony. The proclamation you will hear is that of your mother's life, including religious elements. (Interview Protestant minister)
>
> It should be a ceremony in which [the bereaved] recognise themselves. In which they feel they carry the deceased away. Or guide the deceased to another place. In that sense, faith is important. To the afterlife, in the hands of the living God. Sometimes people ask me not to mention God or the afterlife too self-evidently. For example, because [it] is not evident to them. I try to respect that. How can I respectfully express their doubt, or something in

[7] The meaning of such notions of theological symbolic immortality will be further discussed in chapter five.

> which they don't believe? At the same time, however, if you come to church, it should be an ecclesial funeral. So to me it is unquestionable to speak – perhaps not explicitly then, but implicitly – of the resurrection. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)
>
> As far as religious matters are addressed, I explain what faith meant to the deceased. By doing so, I keep talking about the deceased, and the content remains interesting for all attendants. (Interview Protestant minister)
>
> It is about the faith of a person. That is the starting point for the liturgy. It is what is conveyed and what is elaborated upon in the ceremony. Not only at the beginning, but one finds it during the whole funeral. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

Theological symbolic immortality is thus re-imagined in view of the faith of the deceased and the frame of reference of the bereaved. The eulogy, the intercession, and the sermon are examples of ritual actions wherein much space exists to individualise faith verbally. However, by making particular choices for Biblical texts, hymns, and psalms, the ritual expert can further shape the expression of eternity. Thereby, a balance between transpersonal and personal meaning is sought, in view of those involved as well as one's own religious commitment. In practice, we observed an ongoing process of negotiation between explicitly speaking of God and life beyond death, and implicitly incorporating it in ritual actions:

> [If people have doubts regarding God or the afterlife], I try to be sensitive to it and don't mention too often that eternal life is with God and so on. But the prayers do so themselves anyway. The liturgical texts, the paradisum, already sing of paradise. But then you have to feel how far you can go. What you can convey and what not. You should not annoy people by trying to convince them to believe. Rather, it is about taking care of the deceased with respect. That's how I see it. Burying the dead is an act of compassion. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

Speaking of the faith of a person means that the ritual expert speaks of the life of that person, resulting in ritual creativity and re-invention in practice. Theological immortality is not merely expressed in pre-given scripts and traditional religious symbols, but also comes to the fore in personal symbols (Quartier 2009b). These symbols, expressing and transcending the individual life of the deceased, have started to flourish in relation to the ongoing individualisation and changing role of religion in the Netherlands, and are often used in addition to, and in relation with, traditional symbolism, thus not simply replacing it.

Hence, personal symbols are neither completely new, nor fully based on the person of the deceased:

> I conducted a funeral where the bereaved said they were not religious at all. The deceased was a potter, and she had made a beautiful piece of pottery, a bowl. Her soul was embedded in that piece of work. So I suggested to the family to place some of the pottery she had made near the coffin, including the bowl filled with water. And I used that. So at the end of the service, I poured water over the coffin, guided by the words: "like water, life flowed away from you", and it flowed away in the ritual act, "and now returns to the primal source". That was very strong symbolism, even though the people had told me they did not believe. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

In addition to the meaning conveyed in ritual acts, it is the structure of the funeral that points to theological symbolic immortality. Expressions of the principle of eternity are embedded in the type of funeral that is performed. When choosing a church funeral, theological immortality thus inevitably comes into play. Performing an ecclesial funeral might influence the fate of the deceased or, when it is believed that the fate of the deceased is not to be influenced, it reflects what is hoped to be his or her fate. Even when the bereaved do not identify with Christian beliefs, but only the deceased did, eschatological beliefs become meaningful by means of the wishes and lifestyle of the deceased and the situation at hand.

Another aspect of form that emphasises theological symbolic immortality is the community wherein the funeral takes place, and the tradition of which the deceased is part:

> [After several personal speeches by the bereaved and the playing of popular music] I read the first verses of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". The first words of God that appear in it are "Let there be light". At that moment, I feel, here, in church, a tradition of thousands of years walks in. When I read those words, I'm very aware of this. Something happens. I connect with that tradition to … situate the deceased in that light. To … our quick and temporal lives. We are here very shortly, and very sadly actually. (Interview Protestant minister)
>
> I also think it is the task of a pastor to create a connection between the story of the deceased and the larger story [of Christian tradition]. After all, the large story did not simply drop from the skies. It emerged from the life stories of people. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

Thus, continuity is not only created in the funeral by expressing the belief in eternal life, but also by expressing that the deceased, and all those present who identify with it, are embedded in a tradition that is larger than oneself, transcending all those present. However, the continuity of the ecclesial community and Christian tradition are also challenged. The less people identify with a Christian collective, the weaker its symbolic meaning.

3.5.2 Biological immortality

The notion of belonging to a group of people brings us to the second mode, that of *biological symbolic immortality*: the importance of living on through offspring (biological), or through friends and family in one's social environment (bio-social). In funerary practices biological immorality is emphasised in various ways. First, it comes to the fore in those attending the funeral ceremony, and in inviting people to attend. The presence of a community of funeral participants who – in most cases – share a connection with the deceased, expresses a bio-social connection between the living and the dead.

Second, it comes to the fore in the roles that the bereaved fulfil during the week of preparation, as well as during the performance of the funeral. To do something for the deceased in a particular role, as a child, parent, spouse, or friend, is to express the bio-social relationship between oneself and the deceased. During the ceremony, for example, the lighting of candles – often by grandchildren – emphasises the continuity of life through offspring and acquaintances. Although the symbolism of light is often stressed in this regard, it is also about who is doing the lighting, and who the light refers to. Thus, a biological or bio-social connection can be found in the lighting of candles for other deceased relatives, or in the symbolism of light that ties various deceased relatives together, symbolically creating a 'society of the dead' (Hertz 1907/1960, 58):

> During one of the funerals we observed, a small group of people gathered in the local Protestant church to say farewell to a mother and grandmother. After the singing of Psalm 23 and the eulogy, the minister lighted two candles, in addition to the Easter candle that was already lit. The two candles were special because they referred to the two children of the deceased who had already passed away. While lighting the candles, the minister spoke: "So that they [the two deceased children] are present at this farewell. So that they are reunited again with their parents." (Observation funeral)

Biological and socio-biological immortality are also expressed in the speeches of the bereaved and the ritual experts. Sometimes, as with the lighting of candles, it is expressed by the relationship of the speaker and the deceased. In addition, however, it is also emphasised in the content of what is being said. The following example of the story of Martha and Mary, which we already mentioned earlier, illustrates this in detail:

> During the In Memoriam at the beginning of a Roman Catholic funeral, the daughter of the deceased mentioned the story of Martha and Mary, and referred to the ways in which her mother had cared for others in her environment, in analogy with the story. Then, continuing the eulogy, she read: "In each and every one of us, we recognise a Martha and Maria, listening closely to others and caring for others. […] A life of almost ninety years can be understood in this light. Jannie cared in her own way. With gratefulness and love, we think of her life, and of how we are and will continue to be connected to her. Her love and support to us have been tremendous, and luckily we could return the favour and be there for her at the end. Together […] we have released her hand believing that she now is in the hands of the Eternal. There, we remember her, together with our dad and granddad Jan, with Piet and Geert and all others who we hold dear and have gone before us into eternal light." (Marga, interview recently bereaved)

In the eulogy, Marga not only connects her mother to the principle of eternity and to others who have passed away – her father, her husband, a friend of her mother – but she also connects the essence of her mother to all those present. By creating an analogy between Jannie and the story of Martha and Mary, she highlights the fact that Jannie can be found in each and every one of the funeral participants, and that those present will continue to be connected to her. Notions of ongoing relationships are often assigned great importance, as the following examples further illustrate:

> You will always be with us, because we will never forget you. If you have loved someone so much, it is impossible to forget. (Observation non-ecclesial funeral)
>
> Once, a friend wanted to commemorate his deceased friend by a shared memory, namely, that they used to smoke cigars together. So the man lit up a cigar, took a drag, and placed the cigar on the coffin. That kind of ritual, I thought it was proper. I allowed it, but I also wondered: what should one do with a smoking cigar in church? In retrospect, it was really appreciated. One felt what he wanted to express. It was a simple gesture but very meaningful. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

> During a day of fieldwork in a crematorium in Amsterdam, I observed the funeral of an artist, who passed away in his early seventies. He and his wife, who was also an artist, had given their lives to art. It was who they were, and through the works of art that he (and they) had made during life, his identity was conveyed. When the deceased arrived at the crematorium, and we were to decorate the crematorium hall where the service was to take place, his wife helped in the preparations and brought two items that were of great value to her. One was their most treasured piece of work, a large statue, which was situated near the deceased. The other was a climbing plant, which he had given to her when they just met, and which was still alive. Although only forty centimetres wide, it had a length of approximately three metres, and it was draped over the coffin. (Observation non-ecclesial funeral)

In funerals, the bereaved thus find words, acts, and symbols to express their past, present, and future relationship with the deceased. More generally, the notion that the dead continue to be near us, in our hearts and memory, is profound, but also specific characteristics and shared experiences are enacted in the funeral. Continuing to smoke a cigar together in death as one did in life is an example of this, but also the ongoing care for the artist's climbing plant and the statue, which can be seen as symbols of their relationship and their shared life as artists. To conclude, these examples further emphasise that various modes of symbolic immortality intertwine in funeral performances. The artist's funeral, in particular, invites us to draw attention to the role of creativity in relation to transcending death.

3.5.3 Creative immortality

Expressing the value of the deceased's relationships is also central to the *creative mode of symbolic immortality.* This can influence the structure and the content of the ceremony in two ways. First, the funeral itself can create symbolic immortality by transforming the life of the deceased, as well as the funeral, into making a contribution of lasting value. To those present, the funeral conquers death by speaking of the ongoing value of the life of the deceased. Often, this appeals to the norms, values, and life lessons that can be taken from his life. Creativity, in that sense, not only refers to creating splendid artworks or writing poetry and books, it also refers to leaving a mark on others through one's everyday works, as the following ritual coach neatly articulates:

> What track does someone leave behind? What footprint? […] That varies for everyone. Is it, for instance, that your dad has taught you to work hard?

> And how do you feel about that? Do you recognise it in your own life? Or does it make you realise you would rather not work as hard as your father did? It was typical for him, but has it influenced who you have become? So it actually has to do with the continuity of life. How someone continues to leave a mark on others. (Interview ritual coach)

Another example of the ways in which the funeral is used to create a contribution of lasting value is through charity. Particularly when someone has been ill, but also when a person has contributed to a charity during his or her life, the funeral participants are sometimes asked to contribute to a particular cause during the ceremony. Often, they are asked not to bring flowers, but to donate to a specific charity instead, because that is "what the deceased would have wanted", and it can help other people to continue the very battle that the deceased has fought, for example, against poverty, or that the deceased has lost, for example, against cancer. The following fragment of a folder handed out during a ceremony is an example from one of our interviewees, illustrating how a charity was included in the funeral and connected to the deceased:

> [Name of deceased]
> She will always be near you
> touching you like the wind,
> warming you up like the sun
> and embrace your heart
> with all the little things
> that remind you of her…
>
> Thank you for this beautiful gesture. [The bereaved and the deceased] have asked me to introduce the project in [Brazil] that I've been working on for six years. We try to share something with the people in the favelas and the children living in the street. Together we are strong and able to realise great things, That is the message portrayed in the picture [on this pamphlet]. Created by a group of young people, who dare to dream of a better life for themselves and their loved ones, of equality, of the love of nature. Together we are strong, also in difficult times. We are there for one another.

Second, creative symbolic immortality is established in the ceremony by drawing attention to the works of the deceased. In this way the bereaved can portray certain accomplishments of the deceased, and show his or her ongoing value. We observed this happening in diverse ways. During the funeral of the artist that we mentioned earlier, for example, the speeches included not only what the

deceased had meant to his family and friends, but also how he had made a significant contribution to art and to the local community of artists. However, as noted already, one does not have to be an artist or a musician to acquire creative immortal qualities:

> I was conducting the funeral of a man who was a shoemaker. His shoe last had a central place in the home of his son. And I asked him, what does your father mean to you now? What could we put next to his coffin as an eye catcher, but also as a … well you don't even have to express that in words. So indeed, father's shoe last. I placed it on top of the coffin, and at the end I said: "now you will continue your lives, following in the footsteps of father, but cast in a different mould". (Interview Roman Catholic priest)

In our fieldwork, there were numerous other examples of everyday creativity that was lifted to a higher plane of meaning. Birds were used on a mourning card and in the funeral of a man who had devoted his life to the Dutch society for the protection of birds (*vogelbescherming).* Contributions to a newspaper were mentioned at the funeral of a journalist. And in another instance, the coffee-table was held at a pub that the deceased had built. Thus, the things that the deceased had created during his lifetime, or where he had given his life force, are emphasised to express his or her ongoing significance.

3.5.4 Material immortality

In relation to the creative mode there are objects of the deceased, or objects related to the deceased, that are used to express his or her identity, as well as the continuity of his or her life. Such objects are transformed into personal symbols that shape and preserve the deceased's identity in a material way:

> Her oldest grandchild then stitched a little cross in grandma's embroidery with the idea of: "Well grandma, I am sure that wherever you are, and I do not know where that might be, your embroidery will be finished one day." That is something people find supportive, the idea that her life is not finished yet, that it goes on. (Interview Roman Catholic priest)
>
> Three years ago a bus driver died. I conducted his funeral ceremony. […] All the other drivers wished to attend […] and they formed a double line from the entrance of the auditorium to the place where the deceased would be placed. […] Carrying him in the midst of all his colleagues was the most beautiful ritual one can have. […] Then I started addressing the participants […] I said: "[Vincent], we stand here with you and we can think of only one thing: [Vincent] cannot live without his suitcase, not even in death." And

> then one of his colleagues came forward to bring his suitcase. (Interview ritual coach)
>
> Last week I conducted the funeral of someone who painted. They used one of his paintings for the mourning card, and they also wanted to place paintings in the auditorium. So at both sides of the deceased there were easels with his paintings. Then, it turned out that he also wrote poetry, and I asked the family whether I could see it, perhaps to use it in the ceremony as well. They thought that was a terrific idea. And it turned out that I could do many things with his work. (Interview ritual coach)

These examples show that the boundaries between the material and creative mode, as well as between other modes, are fluid. The objects that someone has made during life can be used in ritual to transcend the lifespan. Also, the deceased can leave a mark of lasting value upon others through these objects. However, when an object has not been made by the deceased, or does not specifically symbolise his life lessons and contributions of lasting value, it can still be used to transcend death. Objects that are associated with the deceased, often metonymically, like a watch or photograph, share in the ongoing power of the deceased's identity (Turner 1973).

One of the fascinating things about objects is that they often continue to be part of the lives of some of the bereaved and, as such, become a focal point for continuing bonds. By shaping and expressing the essence of the deceased through objects, we can observe the making of continuing bonds. Although the ongoing relationship with a deceased loved one is different and differently expressed by each bereaved person – as we will discuss in more detail in chapter six – we can find trajectories of continuing bonds throughout the process of death ritual. The photo that was used during the funeral, for example, at home can become a focal point for ongoing conversations with, and about, the deceased. Through its use in the funeral, it acquires an extraordinary value compared to other photographs. Using grandmother's embroidery to express her identity during the funeral, similarly, makes it a more powerful object in terms of preserving that identity.

Material objects can acquire extraordinary qualities not only during the funeral performance, but also during the preparations. An example from our arrangement interviews illustrates that the deceased is not only kept close to the living, but that objects also keep the living within near proximity of the deceased:

> During the interview, the family told us that they went on holiday after their husband and (grand)father had been diagnosed with cancer. Afterwards, they made a photo album of the experience. Now, arranging the funeral, they did not want to have a picture of the deceased on the coffin, but the photo album instead. Furthermore, they asked whether the album could travel along with the deceased. And so it was placed with the deceased in the mourning room (chapel of rest), in the crematorium, and even joined them at the coffee-table.

Thus, it is not only the ongoing meaning and value of the life of the deceased that is expressed, but predominantly the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead that acquire a central position through objects and practices in the funeral preparations and ceremony.

3.5.5 Natural immortality

The *natural mode of symbolic immortality* influences the funeral arrangements at various levels. In recent decades, environmental concerns have increasingly entered the households of many Dutch and have become an important aspect of people's lifestyles (cf. Rumble & Davies 2012). Nature has become linked to sustainability, and environmental values have become increasingly important. The ongoing rhythms of nature themselves have always been profound in the symbolism of life and death, but the increased role of humanity in this process has made the topic more prominent than ever. Today, natural symbolism is heavily influencing bodily disposal practices. Concepts of nature strikingly determine the choice between a cremation or burial, and the location of the grave and the place of scattering. In the following chapters, we will elaborate on this.
In relation to the funeral performance, natural images have proven to be quintessential in giving meaning to life and death, and in creating a sense of continuity beyond the lifespan. On the one hand, it makes death tangible and meaningful, as it can be observed in nature. On the other hand, it transcends death, as nature continues. Nature illustrates how death can be a source for life and, furthermore, how the environment goes on living. The climbing plant at the artist's funeral was an example of this, but natural immortality is often expressed verbally as well:

> It is winter and it is cold. All of life seems to have flown away into death and the earth. But deeply hidden in the trees and in the people, there is the hunger for the new life of spring. (Funeral speech, interview ritual coach)

Because nature is such a powerful symbol, it is also prominent in many religious narratives of life and death. As the self-evidence of religious narratives is disappearing, the natural symbolism in religious narratives is often used to build a bridge between the different worldviews of the heterogeneous group of funeral participants:

> She was a very colourful woman, so she got a lot of colourful balloons. […] We tried to say goodbye to her in a colourful way, because that's who she was. She also loved roses. That song, the rose, was played and I used it as an image later on. Something like, it should first be planted. It has to die to live again. And then you can connect that beautifully to Christian faith. Because Jesus was the grain of wheat that died in the earth to rise again for us. Then I think, for all of those people who have no connection with Christianity, they do understand that link. They don't have to believe what I tell them about Jesus, but they can make sense of it. (Ritual coach & pastoral worker)

As such, natural symbolic immortality is a powerful tool to create meaningful funerals.

4 Conclusion

By looking at ritual meaning in contemporary Dutch personalised funerals, this chapter has explored the meaning-making process of the recently bereaved from a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background, examining how they seek, create, and take meaning in the funeral preparations and performance (Holloway et al. 2013).

First, attention has been drawn to the presence of the dead body, which evokes a need for ritual practice and ritual meaning among the living. The liminal body mediates a connection between the living and the dead, and inspires people to both accept as well as transcend the reality of death. In caring for the body, its inanimate character is both confirmed as well as contested. At the moment of death, the body evokes a sense of irreversible and immediate separation between the deceased and the bereaved, but in the situation of taking care of the body an intentional psychology can be attributed to it, suggesting that the corpse embodies a form of consciousness within. The body thus evokes situational beliefs regarding the ongoing existence and the gradual departure of the deceased, and simultaneously is a means to act upon one's beliefs. In caring for the body, both the appearance as well as the senses of the deceased are taken into account by the bereaved, as well as by funeral professionals. The corpse is humanised to a greater or lesser degree, and in that act once more transformed

into an animate body. At the same time, an intentional psychology in relation to the body can be absent, pointing to the corpse as an inanimate residue and the belief that death is the end. Either way, we have shown that the bereaved and the professionals care for the body of the deceased in a way that is considered dignified. What is considered dignified, then, is influenced by people's notions about the meaning of death.

Second, we have discussed the motives underlying the choices made by the bereaved concerning the funeral preparations, and we have illustrated what meaning the bereaved wish to express during contemporary funerals. Our survey results emphasised that the bereaved are seeking to create a personalised funeral that not only fits in with their own lifestyle and identity, but that also does justice to the wishes and identity of the deceased. When a religious lifestyle was of significance to the bereaved, but particularly when it was of importance to the deceased, religious belonging and religiosity become important motives in arranging the funeral, and religion becomes a meaningful theme in the ceremony itself. Moreover, as the identity of the deceased is inevitably social, we have shown that celebrating the life of the deceased oscillates with expressing the ongoing meaning of the deceased for the wider social environment.

These results have allowed us to elaborate upon the purpose and function of personalised funerals. How is personal meaning expressed in, and what do people take from, the funerary practices? Our results have shown that funerals not only function to commemorate or celebrate the life of the deceased, to find comfort and support, and to express a sense of shared values, but also provide a means to elevate the life of the deceased. Therefore, we argued that contemporary funerals function as collective performances of symbolic immortality, allowing people to create meaning that celebrates and transcends the life of the deceased, and embrace the continuity of life in the disruptive face of death. We illustrated how this actually takes shape in practice by looking at the diverse ways in which symbolic immortality is expressed in the structure and meaning of funerals.

Through religious images in the funeral and via the performance of the ecclesial funeral itself, the deceased is connected to a principle of eternity. By verbally and non-verbally embedding religious images in the ceremony, the religious expert searches for a balance between implicit and explicit expressions of theological immortality in light of the bereaved and the heterogeneous group of funeral participants. The temporality of one's individual life is further elevated by situating it in the gathering of an ecclesial community and by embedding

the deceased in a tradition over a thousand years old. People's diminished identification with a Christian collective, however, also challenges this symbolism. Exploring this social aspect further, it has become clear that the relationships of the deceased, and the meaning of the deceased for the ongoing lives of those present, are emphasised in the funeral. The importance of bio-social continuity is expressed by the gathering of people to pay their last respects, by people preparing and performing ritual actions, and by the content of these actions. Thus, not only the actions but also the actors are fundamental in terms of ritual meaning. Additionally, notions of creative immortality were of significance, expressing the contributions of lasting value of the deceased. In that regard, not only the works of the deceased were imperative, but the funeral itself can be seen as an act that creates ongoing value in the name of the deceased. In all these modes, objects played a profound role, shaping the post-mortem identity of the deceased and acquiring symbolic qualities that transcend the individuality and temporality of life. Furthermore, by means of their metonymical association with the deceased and their use in the funeral, objects can become a focal point for continuing bonds in the aftermath of the funeral. Lastly, we have illustrated the power of natural symbols, which create a sense of continuity beyond the lifespan in relation to the ongoing rhythms of nature.

In all of these illustrations, it has become clear that various modes of symbolic immortality intertwine in funerals, creating polysemic ritual symbols that bind the heterogeneous group of funeral participants together. Moreover, we have suggested that the images that are sought and created in the funerary practices continue to influence the trajectory of meaning-making in the everyday lives of the bereaved, having acquired a special power to continue extraordinary relationships with the deceased.

CHAPTER 4

THE AMBIGUITY OF HUMAN ASHES

CREMATION PRACTICES AND ENCOUNTERS WITH CREMATED REMAINS

The year 2003 can be viewed as a tipping point in Dutch cremation history. For the first time, cremation took over from burial as the dominant form of bodily disposal (LVC 2016). In 2014, eighty crematoria existed in the Netherlands and in 2015, 63 percent of all funerals involved a cremation (*Pharos International* 2015, 32; LVC 2016). Furthermore, from the 1990s onwards, post-cremation rituals started to thrive in the Netherlands. Sparked by two amendments of the Dutch Burial and Cremation Act, which allowed people to take the ashes home and divide them into parts, post-cremation rituals became increasingly facilitated and promoted by the professionalised death-care industry, local entrepreneurs, and artists. Earlier research has illustrated that these post-cremation rituals, predominantly ash disposals, are important to many bereaved (Heessels 2012; Prendergast, Hockey & Kellaher 2006). However, accounts of recently bereaved people and undertakers, taken during our fieldwork, have suggested that the cremated remains also pose challenges. During meetings with funeral professionals, for instance, it was mentioned that an increasing number of people do not retrieve the ashes from the crematorium.[1] Also, the practical and inevitable character of disposal practices was emphasised in narratives of the recently bereaved. Something must be done with the ashes. However, for those involved it can be difficult to arrive at a decision, and when a decision is made its implementation can present challenges. In other words, the relationship with cremated remains can be less straightforward, less positive, and more dynamic than is often assumed.

This chapter explores cremation and disposal practices in the Netherlands, focusing on the attitudes, practices, and experiences of Dutch bereaved in relation to the cremated remains of their deceased: *What cremation practices are significant to the recently bereaved in the process of death ritual?*[2] To an-

[1] Employees of two large funeral companies (DELA and Yarden) brought up this issue during workshops in 2014 and 2015.
[2] Parts of this chapter were published in *Death Studies* (Mathijssen 2016).

swer this question, this chapter focuses on *choices* made regarding the cremation and ash disposal during the funeral process, the *practices* surrounding the committal of the deceased as well as the ash disposal, and the *meaning* that the bereaved ascribe to the cremated remains. It takes burial practices into account to provide context and comparison for cremation practices. In academic and professional narratives human ashes are commonly described as important, as special or sacred, and as a vehicle to continue intense and physical relationships with the dead (Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012, 475). Based on quantitative and qualitative data, this chapter aims to illustrate the ambiguity of these qualities and relationships. It will highlight the diverse experiences, unexpected challenges, and moral obligations that can be evoked by the deceased's ashes, whereby the latter are seen as embedded in material practices and entangled in social relationships (Hallam 2010).

First, we will situate this chapter in our theoretical framework by looking at our key concepts and by drawing on Grimes' approach of mapping ritual elements (§2). Thereby, we will draw attention to the ambiguous attributes of human ashes. Second, we will elaborate on the methods used, particularly on the measurement instruments and data analysis (§3). The next section (§4) is concerned with disposal practices and choices made during the funeral process and is divided into three parts. We will focus on people's motives for choosing either a burial or a cremation during the funeral preparations (§4.1). Furthermore, we will draw attention to the 'new' practice of witnessing the cremation, which has become increasingly popular in the Netherlands (§4.2). Lastly, we will give an overview of the ash disposal practices of the recently bereaved (§4.3). The following section will further explore the meaning of the cremated remains to the bereaved (§5). We will look at the attitudes of the recently bereaved towards both cremated remains as well as the grave, and will relate people's attitudes to burial and cremation motives, to the witnessing of the cremation, and to forms of ash disposal (§5.1). Subsequently, attention will be given to ambiguous encounters with cremated remains among the bereaved (§6). Thereby, we will discuss ash retrievals (§6.1), deciding on a final destination for the ashes (§6.2), and the role of cremated remains in ritualising relationships between the living and the dead (§6.3). The chapter will conclude with some final remarks, a reflection on the key concepts, and suggestions for further research (§7).

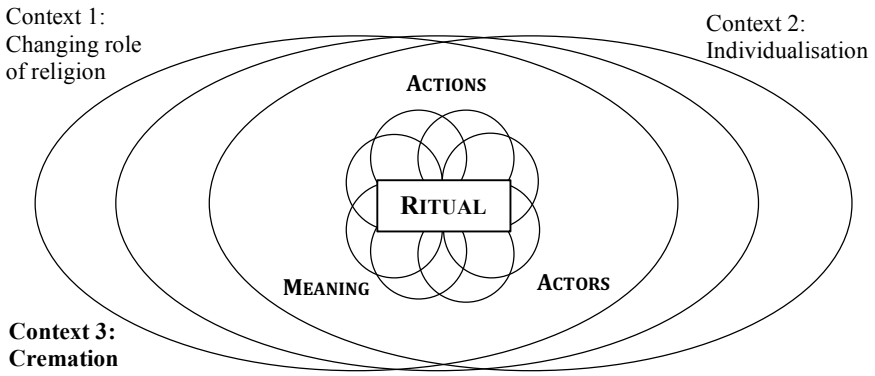

FIGURE 4.1 ELEMENTS OF RITUAL, BASED ON RONALD GRIMES

1 Key concepts: Ritual practice and ritual meaning

The interplay of ritual actions and ritual meaning (Bell 1992, 30) comes profoundly to the fore in relation to cremated remains. The choice to cremate the deceased, rather than to bury him or her, and to dispose of the ashes in a particular way at a particular time, can be a pragmatic one, but inevitably there are diverse motives underlying these choices, and people construct narratives and enact post-cremation rituals that are embedded with symbolic meaning. To study the practices surrounding the cremation and the cremated remains during the protracted process of death ritual, we again employ the key concepts and situate them in the framework of mapping ritual elements as described by Grimes (2014). Rather than focusing on the changing role of religion and the process of individualisation, we will elaborate on the context and development of modern cremation. Thereby, we will look at the ritual actions of the recently bereaved, the involvement of ritual actors, and the meaning behind these actions (Figure 4.1).

1.1 Personalised rites of passage and ritual re-invention

Although ritual follows a certain script, these scripts are by no means exempt from change. Today, people are re-inventing their ritual practices in order to deal with the difficulty of losing a loved one. Among the dearest and nearest bereaved, personalised rites of passage are enacted in a profound manner in relation to cremation, and one can observe very individual, though not asocial, and prolonged incorporation practices with regard to the cremated remains. Ritual creativity surrounding the cremated remains, and the wide range of possibilities

for ash disposals in the Netherlands, can be considered a recent development. Prior to the 1980s ash disposals were mainly conducted by professionals, but since then the immediate family of the deceased has become more involved (Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012, 468). In 1991, permission was granted to take the ashes home, and the Burial and Cremation Act was amended seven years later. Having for a while been merely tolerated, ash disposals were now officially permitted and people were allowed to scatter the ashes and divide them up into parts. Consequently, the market around post-cremation ritualisations has prospered during the last two decades. Urns, scatter tubes, objects, jewellery, paintings, and tattoos have slowly become popular, and have been promoted and facilitated by entrepreneurs and artists (Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012, 469). The result is a dynamic ritual tradition that is currently in the making.

1.2 The protracted process of death ritual

One fundamental outcome of choosing a cremation within the Dutch context, is that it prolongs the funerary practices. When the deceased is buried, the funerary rites commonly end with the internment of the deceased in the cemetery, a ritual that takes place right after the ceremony. Thus, on the day of the funeral, the deceased has reached his final destination in terms of disposal, although the body is not yet in a stable state, and will not be for some years to come. In the case of cremation, the incineration of the deceased also takes place on the same day as the funeral ceremony. However, after the cremation, the deceased has not yet reached his final destination, while in terms of decomposition, the process has been speeded up and he has reached a stable state (Davies 2008, 143; Hertz 1907/1960). The deceased, in the shape of his cremated remains, has to be moved from the cremation chamber (in common Dutch parlance referred to as 'oven') to a temporal urn, or a temporal box or bag, which is placed in a special room on the funerary grounds where the ashes remain for at least one month, in accordance with the Dutch Burial and Cremation Act.[3] After this period the ashes can be collected by the bereaved and be given another temporal or final destination. In practice, the ashes are often claimed later than the statutory month, as more time is frequently needed to decide on the mode, as well as the

[3] The one-month waiting period is typical for the Dutch context and stems from a poisonous murder case in the late 19th century. See section 1.2.3, chapter 1.

temporal or permanent site, of disposal (cf. Kellaher, Hockey & Prendergast 2010, 894).

The temporality of the deceased's destination is likely to influence the status that the bereaved ascribe to their deceased. As long as the ashes are in a liminal state, the funerary process is prolonged. Incorporation may only occur "when the representation of the deceased has required a final and pacified character in the consciousness of the survivors" (Hertz 1960/1907, 82), and the boundary to such a more final situation may only be crossed when ritualised by a territorial passage or journey (Van Gennep 1960, 153–154). Incorporation might, therefore, be delayed as long as the ashes are awaiting their journey, or as long as they are travelling. The representation of the deceased can be influenced by the presence of cremated remains, and is flexible as long as the cremated remains have not yet reached their final destination. A prominent question, therefore, is what does the word 'final' imply, and whether certain forms of ash disposal always include a notion of temporality. Also, it evokes the question of where the deceased is incorporated.

1.3 Situational belief, symbolic immortality & continuing bonds

Elaborate research on ritualising cremation has illustrated the animate nature of human ashes, through which the bereaved negotiate the absence–presence of the deceased in diverse ways and in various spaces (Prendergast, Hockey & Kellaher 2006, 884; Maddrell 2013). The absence of the deceased, for example, experienced through empty spaces in the home or when encountering the ashes, recalls the deceased. Cremated remains, thus, have the potential to evoke physical, symbolic, and intense relationships with the dead, as they provide a focus (cf. Sperber 1975) for memorialisation and for conversation with the deceased (Heessels 2012). Ash objects, that is, objects incorporating human ashes, are consequently not merely seen as objects, but acquire a certain power and agency similar to that of the living. Partly, this is due to their highly ambiguous materiality – as we have also seen in relation to the body of the deceased. Prendergast et al. (2006) have drawn attention to the ambiguity of cremated remains in form and in relation to the materiality of the body. Human ashes are both fluid (crushed) and dry, which gives them the potential for private disposal, portability, and division. Furthermore, as person-objects (Kopytoff 1986), the ashes belong to the person as well as to the corpse, but do not resemble either. They condense and transcend the qualities of the previous life and are often singularised – set apart as 'special' or 'sacred' (Kopytoff 1986, 73; Heessels 2012,

66ff). In cremated remains, the distinction between person and thing becomes blurred (Miller & Parrot 2009, 508) – they can both *represent* and *be* the deceased.

As a result, human ashes can be understood as powerful ritual symbols (Turner 1973, 1103). In the prolonged process of death ritual, the situational beliefs of the bereaved are reinforced and induced by practices in relation to the cremated remains of the deceased. The beliefs that are expressed and enacted surrounding the cremated remains are not static, but dynamic, depending on the circumstances, as this chapter will illustrate (cf. Boivin 2009). In view of the situation at hand, different meanings of the cremated remains can be emphasised, and the ashes can thus symbolise many things. In terms of symbolic immortality (Lifton & Olson 2004/1974), characteristics of the different modes – biological, creative, material, natural, and theological – can be ascribed to the ashes, influencing the decision- and meaning-making of the recently bereaved in the process of death ritual. We suggest that the reasons for choosing a cremation, or for choosing a particular mode of ash disposal, can often be explained in terms of symbolic immortality.

Furthermore, cremated remains have the potential to play a central role in ritualising relationships between the living and the dead. The presence of the cremated remains in a particular form attaches the deceased literally and symbolically to the bereaved. In this chapter, we will draw attention to the power of ashes as a vehicle facilitating ongoing relationships with the dead. However, as we will discuss in more detail in chapter 6, the ashes do not merely allow people to continue to connect (Klass et al. 1996; Walter 1996), but they also play an important role in incorporation practices and, as such, have the power to transform relationships between the living and the dead.

1.4 Research questions

In terms of ritual practice, we are interested in ritual actions and ritual actors. What ritual actions occur surrounding the incineration of the deceased? What practices concerning ash disposal can be observed in a contemporary Dutch context? And what ritual actors are involved in these practices of incineration and ash disposal?

In terms of ritual meaning, we will study the meaning-making process of recently bereaved Dutch people in relation to choosing cremation as the preferred form of bodily disposal, as well as in relation to the disposal of the cremated remains. We will examine what these choices, particularly the motives

underlying the choice for a cremation, can reveal about the meaning-making of recently bereaved Dutch in the face of death. Furthermore, we will explore what practices surrounding the cremated remains can reveal about people's attitudes and beliefs towards the cremated remains. Lastly, we will illustrate the ambiguous and dynamic relationships of the recently bereaved with the ashes of their deceased.

2 Methods

This chapter draws on the semi-structured interviews with Dutch bereaved (n=15), and the (participant) observations from two funeral homes and a crematorium (over a total period of six months), as well as on the conducted survey research carried out among Dutch bereaved (n=198). As we have already described the characteristics and procedures of our methods earlier, here we will only focus on the measurement instruments and quantitative data analysis that are of relevance for this chapter.

2.1 Measuring instruments and data analysis

Regarding cremation and burial we included several items in our questionnaire. The questions, as well as the response options, emerged from the theoretical framework and, most importantly, were grounded in the observations and interviews. We asked participants to rate eight motives for opting for either a burial or cremation, using a five-point scale (1= not important at all, 5= very important). Furthermore, we examined what respondents planned to do with the ashes or what they had already done with them. Seven yes/no options were provided and people had the choice of ticking several boxes. They were also given the opportunity to add other forms of disposal. Third, we included two three-item questions to measure attitudes towards the cremated remains and the grave: "The grave/urn/ashes are important to me", "I consider the grave/urn/ashes as special or sacred" and "The grave/urn/ashes evoke the feeling that the deceased is with me". We again used a five-point scale (1= fully disagree, 5= fully agree).

Concerning procedure, we first conducted a Reliability Analysis on the items that measured people's attitudes towards cremated remains, as well as the grave. We studied attitudes towards the grave to provide context and allow for comparison. Second, we further examined people's attitudes on the basis of bivariate analyses. Thereby, we explored associations with social and funeral characteristics, particularly religious aspects, because of our overall interest in the changing role of religion in Dutch society. In relation to the cremation, we

lastly explored associations between people's attitudes towards cremated remains and cremation motives, people's presence at the actual cremation, and forms of ash disposal.[4]

3 Bodily disposal and the funeral process

3.1 Burial and cremation motives

Exploring the motives that influence people's choice for either a cremation or a burial during the funeral preparations increases our understanding of people's attitudes towards the grave and the cremated remains. Furthermore, comparing cremation and burial motives can shed light on the decision- and meaning-making processes of the bereaved, and the differences between these two modes of bodily disposal. Based on earlier research, as well as on our qualitative material, eight cremation and eight burial motives were formulated (Table 4.1 & Table 4.2).

In relation to cremation, the quantitative results show that the wishes of the deceased, the possibilities surrounding ash disposal, and the absence of grave maintenance most strongly influenced the decision to cremate the deceased. At the other end of the spectrum, two things stand out. Religious motives did not play a role.[5] Furthermore, when respondents more strongly identified with being religious, there is no relevant association ($r=.18$, $p<.05$). More surprising, perhaps, is the result that matters of finance were not considered a motive to choose a cremation. Whereas the incineration or internment of the deceased is included in funeral insurance, that is, when people are insured, the costs for the grave or ash disposal are not covered. And although the difference in cost between a burial and a cremation can be marginal, this largely depends on the type of grave or form of ash disposal chosen. The costs for a grave, for instance, are often similar or more expensive compared to the costs of an urn grave, whereas informal dealings with the cremated remains are normally less

[4] Through reliability analysis, we can combine several single items into a scale, and explore whether that scale is consistent. Thus, can several single items together measure a more complex concept, in this case, attitudes towards the cremated remains and the grave? As we explained in the previous chapter, bivariate analyses allow us to explain whether different variables are related to one another. It enables us, for instance, to explore whether older people agree more with traditional afterlife beliefs than younger people. An important limitation of bivariate analyses is that they do not explain the relationship. Thus, on the basis of such an analysis, we can only say that older people agree more with traditional beliefs, but not that they do so because they are older. Other factors might be involved.

[5] The sample of this study is limited to Roman Catholic, Protestant and religiously unaffiliated respondents, and we thus have excluded a group of Hindus for whom cremation can be strongly linked to religious motives. For further information on Hindu death rituals in the Netherlands, see Swhajor et al. (2010).

TABLE 4.1 CREMATION MOTIVES

CREMATION MOTIVE	MEAN (SD)
WISHES OF THE DECEASED (1)	4.6 (.84)
POSSIBILITIES OF ASH DISPOSAL (5)	3.4 (1.32)
NO GRAVE MAINTENANCE (2)	3.3 (1.28)
IDEA OF BURIAL UNPLEASANT (7)	2.9 (1.30)
CREMATED FAMILY MEMBERS (3)	2.9 (1.34)
ENVIRONMENT (4)	2.6 (1.32)
FINANCIAL MATTERS (6)	2.2 (1.15)
RELIGIOUS MOTIVES (8)	1.6 (.83)

NOTE: N=133

TABLE 4.2 BURIAL MOTIVES

BURIAL MOTIVE	MEAN (SD)
WISHES OF THE DECEASED (1)	4.7 (.70)
A PLACE TO VISIT (2)	4.0 (1.14)
BURIED FAMILY MEMBERS (3)	3.8 (1.25)
BURIAL AS NATURAL WAY OF DISPOSAL (4)	3.6 (1.17)
SYMBOLISM OF THE EARTH (5)	3.4 (1.20)
RELIGIOUS MOTIVES (8)	3.2 (1.40)
NOTION OF FIRE AS UNCOMFORTABLE (6)	2.8 (1.28)
CREMATION AS UNPLEASANT (7)	2.6 (1.22)

NOTE: N=57

costly. We must, therefore, take into account that people responded to this issue in a socially desirable way. Although transparency around funeral costs is on the increase, and the so-called 'budget-funerals' are gaining ground in the Dutch context, it is likely still true that people don't want to be cheap about the death of a loved one.

In relation to burial, as with cremation, the wishes of the deceased were considered to be the most important motive. Having a place to visit, the burial of other family members, and the natural symbolism associated with burial were also important factors in making this decision. Thereby, it is interesting that the motive of fellow family members plays a more profound role in the case of burial, than in the case of cremation, while both forms of disposal, at least theoretically, provide the possibility of keeping the deceased within proximity of each other. This suggests that cemeteries are still seen as places where the dead rest together.[6] Religious motives played a small role in the choice for a burial. This motive increased when people identified as being more religious (r=.35,

[6] In the case of cremation, an urn grave can of course be chosen as well, creating a similar memorial place. We will return to this when discussing forms of ash disposal. When we speak of a burial or a grave, we speak of earth burials. When we speak of urn graves, this is explicitly mentioned.

p<.005). Also, religious motives were generally more important among Protestant respondents (M=2.7, SD=1.75), of whom 72 percent chose a burial over cremation, than among Roman Catholic (M=3.0, SD=1.45) and religiously unaffiliated respondents (M=2.7, 1.33).[7] Lastly, the results show that being uncomfortable with cremation was not a strong motive to choose a burial. The same was true for choosing a cremation in relation to burial. Thus, people's decisions regarding the type of disposal are more strongly influenced by the positive qualities and possibilities of the type of disposal chosen, rather than by the negative qualities of the other option.

3.2 Multiple motives: Negotiations between the wishes of the deceased and the bereaved

The survey results show that the decision to choose either a burial or a cremation strongly originated from the deceased person. As with other choices made during the preparation of the funeral ceremony (chapters 2 and 3), the wishes of the deceased are seen as the most important factor in making decisions regarding bodily disposal. Our interviews with the recently bereaved can increase our understanding of what it means to follow the wishes of the deceased in this regard. They illustrate that the choice for a particular type of disposal is often a joint effort made between the deceased and the bereaved, regularly discussed when the deceased was still alive, and decided upon in view of the lifestyle of the deceased (Davies 2015; Giddens 1991). Social relationships, thus, have a profound impact on the choice for a particular form of disposal. Furthermore, accounts of the bereaved show that the other motives that people identified with, such as having a place to visit or not having a place to maintain, entered talks about funeral wishes during life. Moreover, there is rarely only one motive involved in making the decision between burial and cremation. The choice to either cremate or bury the deceased is grounded in a bricolage of positional meanings (Turner 1973).

The profound role of the deceased and his relations, and the dialogue between the deceased and the bereaved regarding the type of disposal, clearly came to the fore in our interviews:

> [We chose to cremate my mother] because no one visits the cemetery anymore. When my grandfather died, he was buried here [at the local ceme-

[7] These means should be interpreted with care because of the low number of respondents in the different groups in relation to burial (n Catholic=21, n Protestant=21, n religiously unaffiliated=15).

> tery]. My grandmother then bought a little plot at the cemetery. She said, I've been married to him […] so I want to lie next to him. […] By the time she died, my grandmother could be placed on top of my grandfather. So we buried her in the same grave, and the spot next to it remained empty. That place would become my mother's grave. But then she decided for herself that she wanted to be cremated. (Interview recently bereaved, Marja, 50)
>
> The graves of my parents have been cleared. And [my grandparents] are still lying in the old cemetery. No living soul goes there. You understand? And they don't care for or maintain that place anymore. So my wife [who passed away] and I said to each other, we don't need that anymore. We also discussed it with our daughter, the pros and cons of burial and cremation. She told us as well, "whatever you decide, I'm fine with either choice", but she preferred cremation too. So for us it was not a point of discussion. It was just self-evident. (Interview recently bereaved, Gerrit, 84)
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> Well, mum had not really explicitly told us whether she wanted to be buried or cremated. But, what I remember of her. If she had had the chance to speak up about the matter, she would have felt, I think, more comfortable about burying than cremating. And we [my siblings and father] all feel that way actually. We all think a grave is much more comforting than a little jar. (Interview recently bereaved, Lisa, 34)

Second, in relation to cremation, the survey results showed that the possibilities surrounding ash disposal were considered to be a motive to opt for cremation. In our interviews with the bereaved, the attributes of portability and fluidity particularly played a role, and were given symbolic meaning:

> From a Christian point of view, I don't have a preference for burial or cremation. It is both dead anyway. Uhm, but an urn can be used to scatter the ashes somewhere over the earth. I actually think that is a beautiful thought. Yes. You can also be put underground of course. (Interview recently bereaved, Jan, 60)
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> In a way, I think a burial can be beautiful. My father was buried when I was young. I can remember that. My mother was cremated. When I see that coffin being lowered into the ground, I think, well, nothing will remain of it. You can visit the place. The tombstone. Then you can read the names, the date of birth, and date of death. But I think it is so cold. Nothing remains of the body. And then I think … Yes, ashes too, nothing remains too. I actually dislike death. […] You don't want to go. But between a burial and a cremation, I find a cremation more … Yes, perhaps … The cemetery of my father, for example, I never went there. I had no connection to it. The place was pretty nice, but I felt no connection to that coffin or that tomb. And my husband was a walker. So I decided to cremate him. He wanted it himself too, you know. (Interview recently bereaved, Anna, 77)

For others, it was the solidity of having a place that was valued. Commonly, this was related to having a place to visit, to knowing other people who were buried there, and to the symbolic meaning of nature in relation to death:

> When you bury someone, in a sense, you return the body to earth. And that happens as it happens. But I feel burial gives a bit more time and demands a bit more time. A more natural process. The connection with the earth. It is different. (Interview recently bereaved, Charles, 57)
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> We agreed, because the children preferred it, that we both wanted to be buried. "You will stay behind, so we will do what you want." So we decided to be buried, and we also picked a cemetery. [My husband] wanted to go to [a cemetery in the woods, a bit further away]. But I said, well, if one of us can't drive anymore, how do we get there? He agreed, so now I can walk over. (Interview recently bereaved, Bettie, 84)

Having a place was not only important in relation to burial, but also in relation to cremation. Through urn graves people create memorial places for their deceased, but by scattering the ashes or by placing the ashes in a particular space, meaningful places are also created. At the same time, not having a place, particularly the absence of grave maintenance, was identified as an important reason to choose cremation. In many interviews the bereaved expressed a concern for other family members in maintaining the grave, or the deceased had expressed such a concern:

> We placed [the urn of my mother in the urn grave of my father]. We have a little plot [at the local cemetery]. My mother and father always wanted to be buried there, but my father, when, at a certain point, he realised that he would die, changed his mind. […] He wanted to be cremated. He always saw me going to [the grave of my husband at the cemetery], and he thought it was too much work. So in the end, we decided to rent a small urn grave […] for mum and dad, with a small stone and a few plants on it, and that was it. My consideration to do this was that now, at least, he lies in the same cemetery as his grandparents, all of his friends, and my husband. And the urn grave is much easier to maintain. (Interview recently bereaved, Marga, 60)
>
> I felt more comfortable with cremating, because I feel that burying … I think that young fathers and mothers should be buried, because children need to be able to visit their father and mother. But at my age … It would be far too complicated for the children. They will never visit. They don't have time for that. Perhaps in the first year, but then it will stop. With young children it is different. So that's why we both chose to be cremated. (Interview recently bereaved, Elizabeth, 79)

In general, people did not choose a cremation because they disliked the idea of a burial, and vice versa. Thus, motives were more strongly described in terms of what was meaningful about cremation or burial itself. However, feeling uncomfortable with certain forms of disposal was mentioned by some of our interviewees:

> I asked him, "Do you want to be buried?" "Yes, you can bury me." But then he said: "But, well, then you can never leave anymore. The place has to be maintained, costs, this and that." "Yes," he said, "and I will be eaten underground." He said, "Put me through the pipe, then it is all gone and neat." I have chosen that for myself too. I don't want to be buried underground. Locked up in a small dark space. It seems unpleasant. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne, 53)
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> Cremation bothers me. I think it is so absolute. To leave someone behind, and then into that oven. And to have no place to visit. It is so raw. I don't see anything in it. To be put in those flames? I find it bizarre. (Interview recently bereaved, Lisa, 34)

The burial of other family members was, as we have seen, an important reason to choose a burial. It was less dominant in the choice for choosing a cremation, but not absent from our interviews:

> [My mother] wrote a note to my brother and me a few years ago. She said my dad was cremated too, and my grandmother, her mum, as well. […] We both read it. Well, okay, if that is what she wanted. It was her wish. (Interview recently bereaved, Nellie, 62)

The wishes of the deceased are thus strongly taken into account when choosing between a burial and cremation. However, our interviews show that the wishes of the deceased can seldom be understood without the wishes of the bereaved. We can observe multiple motives underlying the choice to bury or cremate, grounded in the lifestyle of the deceased and their relations. Furthermore, the accounts of the bereaved illustrate that the cremated remains and the grave – both an urn grave and an earth grave – play an important role in the ongoing lives of the bereaved, either as an obstacle that has to be dealt with, or as a comforting place that allows for ongoing relationships between the living and the dead. The grave and ashes, therefore, have the power to evoke notions of symbolic immortality. Through the materiality of the remains, in whatever form, the dead continue to be attached to the living, and can simultaneously be attached to

the other dead. In terms of both burial and cremation, the ongoing rhythms of nature, as well as the graves and disposal sites of other deceased next of kin, were meaningful to the bereaved, resembling notions of natural and bio-social immortality. None of our interviewees referred to religious motives in choosing between a burial and cremation. However, it must be noted that we did not explicitly ask about religious or any other particular motives, but invited people to formulate their motives themselves. This corresponds with our survey results, where religious motives played a role among the more religious-minded group of respondents in relation to burial, but were less important than the wishes of the deceased, having a place to visit, other family members, and natural symbolism. Creative notions of symbolic immortality did not explicitly emerge in the motives of our interviewees for choosing a burial or cremation, but came clearly to the fore in people's relationships with the remains. They are profound in relation to grave visits (Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2005) and, as we shall later see, in relation to ash disposals.

3.3 Witnessing the cremation

Our fieldwork showed that, in the Netherlands, an increasing number of immediate 'family' members chooses to witness the actual cremation of the deceased, i.e., the placement of the coffin in the cremation chamber. Crematoria have developed from technical 'non-places' to symbolic places (Klaassens & Groote 2014, 1). Facilities are enhanced, taking symbolic meaning into account, and funeral directors and ritual experts increasingly discuss with the bereaved the possibility of observing the cremation.[8] In many crematoria adjustments have taken place to improve facilities for witnessing cremations, thereby making room for an accumulative practice that prolongs the process of death ritual. It was our wish to explore how many of our respondents had witnessed the crema-

[8] The emphasis on symbolic meaning came to the fore during our fieldwork and in other collaborations within the field. At Monuta, for example, one of the large undertaker businesses, an intern studied the ways wherein the design of crematoria influenced the experience of saying farewell to the deceased. Also, two architects approached our research centre to write a research proposal that aimed to improve the architecture of crematoria in terms of the emotions and meaning-making of the bereaved. Many other examples of these are profound in the Dutch context (see Klaassens & Groote 2014). Furthermore, refurbishments of crematoria, although mainly not based on research about the experiences of the bereaved, were explained in terms of symbolic meaning. At the Nieuwe Ooster, for example, a crematorium in Amsterdam, the coffin can rise upwards into the 'air', to the first floor, at the end of the ceremony. Although this was the only option when refurbishing the crematorium, as the building has a monumental status and the cremation chamber is upstairs, the symbolic meaning of going up to 'heaven' is emphasised in view of the bereaved, and in practice enhanced by undertakers, who, for example, make suggestions to play particular songs at the end of the ceremony, such as Eric Clapton's 'Tears in heaven'.

tion, how this experience was valued, and how it had influenced people's attitudes towards the cremated remains.

Of the respondents who had been involved with a cremation, 14 percent had been present during the placement of the coffin in the cremation chamber. They valued this as highly important (M=4.5, SD=.70). This suggestion is further enhanced by accounts from our participant observations, during which people expressed the value of witnessing the cremation. The crematorium employees in the region of Arnhem-Nijmegen pointed out that many people wanted to witness the cremation, and that many people experience it as comforting. At the same time, they explained that it was also confrontational, emphasising the importance of guiding people through the event. Among the bereaved, the notion that it was meaningful to accompany the deceased all the way to the end was profound. However, accounts from our interviewees and participant observations also illustrated challenges regarding the witnessing of the cremation and, furthermore, pointed to implications and difficulties that might emerge if not having witnessing it:

> We all walked along to the cremation chamber, but when the actual cremation [of my mother] was about to happen, some people left. So only our own family stayed. You are really guided through this process. The [crematorium employee] explained what was going to happen and in what way. […] Then, they place the coffin on some sort of belt. The flowers are taken off. And then they asked us to loosen the screws of the coffin. The lid. So I looked at the man [surprised and disturbed]. He said, "Does someone want to do that?" I said, "Well, I will." Together with my daughter-in-law. So we unscrewed them. That was a horrible moment. To re-open that coffin. (Interview recently bereaved, Marja, 50)

> [During the preparations with the ritual coach] she asked whether I wanted to witness and help place my brother in the cremation chamber […]. I said, of course I will not do that. Really not. But if she had asked me after the ceremony, I would have done it. You know what I mean? I also told her. I had no idea of what lay ahead, of what was going to happen, of what she was asking me. But in retrospect, I think, I would have done it. I really miss that piece now. I miss that piece of our life together. I have not finished it in a good way. I didn't [guide] him until the end, I haven't fulfilled [my duty] … I miss a part of myself. […] [When I retrieved his ashes from the crematorium] I told [the crematorium employee] that I had to know where he had gone. I had to see where [the cremation] had happened. […] Then I saw how it works. He showed me everything. Then, I found more peace actually. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne, 53)

What mainly stands out from these two accounts, is the fact that the bereaved did not know what was going to happen. The fact that the screws of the coffin had to be removed was very disturbing to Marja, which was further underlined as she retold the story a few times during the interview. At the same time, the events she witnessed during the cremation were highly meaningful to her. She explained that she was standing there with her daughter-in-law, who was over eight-months pregnant, and at that particular moment she could feel the baby. "Then I felt like, my mother is going, but there is new life." In the case of Yvonne, it is also clear that she did not know what to expect. The ritual expert asked her whether she wanted to witness the cremation, but she did not know what that implied. Furthermore, her story shows that for her, the ending of the ceremony in the auditorium did not suffice. She explained that she felt like she had "left [her brother] behind. Like [she had] walked away from him". These accounts show just how important is the job of the ritual expert. Although they more often become the person who is chairing the funeral ceremony, they are also the ones who guide the bereaved and who give them tools to make the best possible decisions during the funeral process.

Guiding the bereaved in terms of witnessing the cremation is by no means a self-evident task for professionals yet. Although the number of people who choose to witness is increasing, it was not a standard topic in the arrangement and preparation interviews in which we participated. The reasons for not mentioning the witnessing possibilities were diverse. Sometimes the funeral director felt it did not fit in with the particular family, and sometimes they told us afterwards they had not thought about the option. Also the policy and possibilities of the particular crematorium were taken into account. The possibility of witnessing was more frequently mentioned when encouraged by the crematorium that was chosen.

Furthermore, we observed discussions among professionals about whether witnessing the cremation or not is a comfort to the bereaved, discussions that also strongly intertwined with practicalities. An example of this came to the fore during the participant observations at a crematorium in Amsterdam, which had been recently renovated. The place to witness the cremation was divided up into a back region, a room were the ashes were collected from the cremator and subsequently cremulated and placed in a box, and a front region, a room looking 'neat' and 'comfortable', making it possible to invite the bereaved to witness the event. However, with the renovation, a new oven had also been purchased, which challenged the witnessing possibilities because it reached ex-

tremely high temperatures, especially in the afternoon. Within this context, different opinions regarding the witnessing of the cremation emerged. Generally, witnessing was not encouraged, and especially not later than eleven in the morning. Thus, if people wished to witness the cremation and asked for it, they were able to, but it was not actively encouraged and preferably would not happen in the afternoon. One reason given for this policy was that due to the increasing temperature of the oven, the coffin would more easily and very quickly catch fire. Some employees said that seeing the flames would be disturbing for the bereaved, whereas others said that the bereaved would expect the flames: "If you think of a cremation, you think of fire, don't you?" Then, the possibility of not seeing flames could also be disturbing. Others said it was not about the flames at all, but about the process of pushing the coffin into an oven with such high temperatures. The operator of the oven explained that the incinerations happened very quickly, in general, but with the oven being so hot, the quickness of the incineration was especially important. Although the incineration of the deceased was largely an automatic process, the chance of something going wrong increased resulting from the higher temperature of the oven.[9] Thus, to summarise, different views existed regarding the actual witnessing of the cremation, and practical matters also played a significant role in whether or not witnessing the cremation was encouraged.

3.4 Forms of ash disposal

Ash disposals occurred in various forms among our respondents (Table 4.3), and our results indicate that people often choose more than one way to dispose of the cremated remains. In our survey, 67 percent of respondents planned to conduct one form of ash disposal, 29 percent intended to dispose of the ashes in two ways, and 4 percent said they wanted to dispose of the ashes in three different ways.

The most popular form of ash disposal was scattering, chosen by nearly two-thirds of our respondents. This includes scattering on the funerary ground as well as in non-institutionalised spaces, by either professionals or the bereaved. Through the act of scattering, meaningful places are created for the deceased within or without the everyday environment of the bereaved. Particularly

[9] Problems, for instance, can arise when the coffin catches fire to early, that is when it is not completely in the oven yet.

TABLE 4.3 ASH DISPOSAL

TYPE OF DISPOSAL OR DESTINATION	PERCENTAGE
SCATTERING	65
ASH OBJECTS: JEWELLERY, URN, OTHER OBJECT	26
URN AT HOME	17
URN GRAVE	12
DON'T KNOW (YET)	10
DIVIDING INTO PARTS	5
NOTHING	4

NOTE: MULTIPLE RESPONSE. N=133

interesting is the second largest group of people, who chose to create an ash object. In a 2006 national survey, ash objects were mentioned by 4 percent of the Dutch population, with a higher figure of 14 percent among younger respondents (Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012, 468; Van Keulen and Kloosterboer 2009). Almost a decade later, we find that 26 percent of our respondents chose this form of disposal. The third largest group, 17 percent, wanted to bring the ashes home, for instance to be placed on a cabinet in the living room, creating a domestic memorial. Through ash objects or by taking the ashes home, the bereaved are keeping their deceased in near proximity. Moreover, as will be further described below, the presence of the ashes at home may induce an ongoing process of ritualising, whereby the bereaved continuously seek and create fitting places for their deceased. Additionally, 12 percent chose an urn grave. This also includes people who wished to place the ashes in the grave of another family member. Comparable to the act of scattering, yet confined to the funerary ground, this allows the bereaved to create a place for their deceased, to be visited if desired. The results also show a notable group of respondents (10%) who did not (yet) know what to do with the ashes, when confronted with such a choice. A small group of people, 5 percent, wished to divide the ashes into parts. This figure should be interpreted with care, as nearly one third of respondents planned to conduct several ash disposals, and because some of the other means of disposal also imply a division of the cremated remains. One sees this most notably with ash objects. It is interesting, however, that only a few respondents seemed to identify with the division of the ashes itself, even though this is one of the typical attributes of cremated remains. Last of all, we found that 4 percent of respondents were not planning to do anything with the ashes. Answers to the open question could be combined with the other response options. Although these numbers are explorative, they provide an interesting over-

view of the ways of disposal of cremated remains in the Netherlands, for which no prior figures exist.

4 Cremated remains and the grave

So far, we have described the motives of the bereaved in choosing either a cremation or burial, and have drawn attention to practices surrounding the cremation, namely the witnessing of the incineration of the deceased, and the different forms of ash disposal. To further elaborate on this, we are interested in the meaning that the bereaved ascribe to these decisions and practices. In this section, we will quantitatively explore people's attitudes to the cremated remains and the grave, and relate these attitudes to the practices that we have just described. What do the motives behind choosing a cremation or burial reveal about people's dealings with human remains? Does the witnessing of the cremation affect people's attitude towards the ashes? And what do the diverse practices of ash disposal reveal concerning the meaning of cremated remains to the bereaved?

4.2 Attitudes towards the cremated remains and the grave

Based on two three-item questions in the questionnaire, we constructed two scales: one on attitudes towards the grave (α=.72) and the other regarding cremated remains (α=.95). Respondents answered either the burial (n=58) or the cremation questions (n=133), depending on the type of funeral in which they had participated. The results show a moderate positive attitude towards the grave. Contrary to our expectations we found a neutral attitude towards the cremated remains (Table 4.4).

Because of our interest in the changing role of religion, and a particular interest in attitudes towards cremated remains among the religiously unaffiliated

TABLE 4.4 ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GRAVE AND CREMATED REMAINS

SCALE	ITEMS	MEAN (SD)
GRAVE	TO ME, THE GRAVE IS IMPORTANT.	3.6 (1.01)
	I VIEW THE GRAVE AS A SPECIAL (EXTRAORDINARY, SACRED) PLACE.	
	AT THE GRAVE, I FEEL THE DECEASED IS WITH ME.	
CREMATED REMAINS	TO ME, THE ASHES OR URN ARE IMPORTANT.	3.0 (1.27)
	I VIEW THE ASHES OR URN AS SPECIAL (EXTRAORDINARY, SACRED).	
	THROUGH THE ASHES OR URN, I FEEL THAT THE DECEASED IS WITH ME.	

respondents, who chose this type of disposal in large numbers, we further examined the value ascribed to human remains in relation to some personal and funeral characteristics, on the basis of bivariate analyses (Table 4.5). The results show that attitudes towards the grave and towards cremated remains were significantly affected by the religious affiliation of the bereaved. Roman Catholic respondents valued both categories significantly higher than the religiously unaffiliated and the Protestants. There is, however, no relevant and significant difference between Protestant and religiously unaffiliated respondents. The results among Roman Catholics show slightly positive attitudes towards cremated remains (M=3.3, SD=1.26) and highly positive attitudes towards the grave (M=4.3, SD=.69). For Protestants, we found slightly positive attitudes towards the grave (M=3.3, SD=.91), but negative attitudes towards cremated remains (M=2.0, SD=1.12). The results of the group of religiously unaffiliated respondents reflected a neutral attitude towards the grave (M=3.1, SD=1.13) and a slightly negative attitude towards cremated remains (M=2.7, SD=1.19). The results also show a significant association between values towards the grave and the religious affiliation of the deceased. Such a relationship was not found with cremated remains. When the deceased was a Catholic, compared to no religious

TABLE 4.5 SOCIAL LOCATION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE GRAVE AND CREMATED REMAINS. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL-TYPE, FUNERAL-TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, RELATIONSHIP, GRAVE VISITS; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) WITH SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	GRAVE	CREMATED REMAINS
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
SEX (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.12	-.21*
AGE	-.06	-.20*
EDUCATION	-.16	-.20*
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.49**	.26**
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.23	-.20*
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.27*	.13
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.32*	-.08
RELIGIOSITY	.04	.04
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.11	-.16
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.26*	-.07
VISITING GRAVE	.28*	-

ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

affiliation, a higher value was ascribed to the grave. For Protestants, we found that the bereaved ascribed less value to the grave. Religiosity and the type of funeral – ecclesial or non-ecclesial – did not show any associations with the value towards the grave or cremated remains.

In relation to the other variables, one can observe that women, younger respondents, and those with lower education levels, value the cremated remains more highly. These associations were not found in relation to the grave. As regards the grave, we found two significant associations, which in turn were absent in relation to cremation. People who had lost their partner valued the grave as more important than people who had lost their parent. The grave was also seen as more important and special by those who had visited the grave.

Some of the results are in line with our expectations. We anticipated a higher appreciation of the grave in comparison with cremated remains among religiously affiliated respondents, as Christian commitment to modern cremation practices has been relatively late and the liturgical language and ritual structure have essentially remained focused on burial (Davies 2008, 143; Mathijssen 2014, 139). Looking at attitudes towards cremated remains between the two groups, the results evidence a higher appreciation of cremated remains among Catholics than Protestants. Possible explanations are the intermediary relationships between the living and the dead, and the Catholic familiarity with ritual objects and reliquaries (Greely 2000). However, we did not expect neutral attitudes towards cremated remains, in general, and neither did we anticipate the slightly negative attitudes of unaffiliated respondents. The low agreement in the unaffiliated group is particularly remarkable if one considers the high number of people who chose a cremation in this group (81%). Furthermore, these results are surprising in relation to the professionalised funerary culture that facilitates and promotes post-cremation ritualisations.[10]

4.2.1 Cremation motives, witnessing the cremation, and disposal practices

To further understand the moderate positive attitude towards the grave, and the neutral attitude towards cremated remains, we conducted a bivariate analysis between people's attitudes towards the grave, the ashes and the cremation, burial motives, the witnessing of the cremation, and forms of ash disposal. Exploring the motives and practices of the bereaved in relation to human remains can

[10] Among funeral professionals there is a strong awareness of the challenges surrounding cremated remains. However, these concerns mostly remain backstage and have not (yet) found a way into the public discourse.

shed light on the value that the bereaved ascribe to the ashes or grave of their deceased.

In relation to *cremation motives*, we found one moderate significant association. Respondents who had chosen a cremation because of the possibilities surrounding ash disposal valued the cremated remains as more important ($r=.25$, $p<.01$). Regarding burial, four significant associations were found. The grave was seen as a more important and special place, providing a connection with the deceased, among respondents who wanted a place to visit ($r=.73$, $p<.001$). Also, people who chose a burial because of the earth's symbolism ($r=.45$, $p<.01$) and the 'natural' aspects of burial ($r=.45$, $p<.001$), valued the grave as more important. In relation to burial, another remarkable association was found. People who felt that cremation was unpleasant valued the grave more strongly ($r=.39$, $p<.01$). This suggests that a sense of comfort is associated with the grave. Overall, these results show that people value the remains more strongly when they choose a form of disposal because of its typical characteristics – i.e., having a natural place or a wide variety of disposal options. The fact that people who want to visit the grave or who wish to do something with the ashes value the remains as more important is, in itself, not surprising, but further sparks the question of why human remains, in particular in relation to cremation, are overall not highly valued by the bereaved.

Second, we wondered how *various forms of disposal* relate to people's attitudes towards the cremated remains. The results of the bivariate analysis show four significant associations. We find a very strong association between highly valuing the ashes and keeping the ashes at home ($r=.46$, $p<.01$). We also find a strong association with ash objects ($r=.39$, $p<.01$). Respondents who choose to scatter the ashes express lower values towards the cremated remains: the results show a strong negative association ($r=-.26$, $p< .01$). The last strong negative association we find is with people who are not planning to do anything with the ashes ($r=-.31$, $p<.01$). This suggests a difference between forms of ash disposal that keep the dead in near proximity, and ways of disposal that 'set the ashes free'.[11] Those who keep the ashes close describe the ashes as more important, sacred, and as a means of continuing their bonds with the dead. Those who let go of the ashes express less attachment and ascribe less value to the dead matter itself. However, this does not imply that the ashes are of no im-

[11] There were no relevant and significant associations between the value ascribed to the cremated remains and having an urn grave, nor with dividing the ashes and not (yet) knowing what to do with them.

portance or symbolic value at all; neither does it take into account the meaning of the practice of scattering and the meaning of space. We will return to this later in the chapter, as well as in chapter 6.

Third, we looked at the practice of *witnessing the cremation* in relation to the value attributed to cremated remains. The results show that people who viewed the actual cremation are likely to have more positive attitudes towards cremated remains ($r=.28$, $p<.01$). This suggests that witnessing the actual cremation might strengthen the intimacy between the cremated remains and the bereaved (Davies & Mates 2005, 58).

5 The ambiguity of cremated remains

The neutral attitudes towards cremated remains among our respondents, and particularly the slightly negative attitudes towards cremated remains among the religiously unaffiliated, indicates that people experience a certain ambiguity in relation to the remains of their deceased. In line with earlier research, our qualitative material suggested that people highly valued the ashes, rather than viewing them in a neutral or negative manner. In other words, people did not simply discard the ashes as something unimportant, but, reviewing the qualitative material from our quantitative results, we observed that many challenges and dynamics were visible among the recently bereaved. In the following three paragraphs, we wish to highlight some of the ambiguities that stood out in the narratives of the interviewees: people's experiences with the ash retrieval, the process of making decisions about place, time, and involvement in relation to the disposal, and the challenges between letting go of the deceased and keeping him or her close.

5.1 Ash retrievals

One explanation for people's neutral attitudes towards the ashes is their confrontational nature (cf. Kellaher et al. 2010). This particularly came to the fore in relation to the ash retrievals, which take place at the crematorium from a month after the funeral ceremony onwards. Our observations and interviews suggest that the retrieval of the ashes, being both a dead object and a deceased subject (Troyer 2007; Kopytoff 1996), is often challenging for the bereaved. At the crematorium where we conducted participant observations, the ashes were retrieved from the office building, which is at a different location in the funerary ground than the actual crematorium. A room was attached to the welcoming hall, where people were offered coffee and tea, and where the practicalities

around retrieving the ashes were arranged during a short appointment. Walking into the office, the bereaved exhibited many differing emotions. For some, picking up the ashes was a peaceful, comfortable, and even joyful experience, but for others it involved distressing and painful feelings. The diverse examples that the employees gave us showed us a whole spectrum of reactions. Whereas some people cheerfully exclaimed that they "came to pick up mum", there were also instances where people found it difficult to even enter the building. Amidst this diversity, the employees agreed on the fact that it was difficult to predict how people would actually react once the ashes were brought into the room. For this reason, the ashes are only brought in after the legal and practical forms have been signed, a practice also in use at other crematoria (Venhorst & Mathijssen 2017).

Thus, it is difficult, both for the bereaved as well as for the professionals, to anticipate what will happen on one's initial encounter with the cremated remains. Although the people we interviewed had reflected upon the ash retrieval beforehand, they encountered unforeseen situations – in addition to emotions – when they went to collect the ashes, or when they divided them among family members. The quantity of ashes received was often the cause of intense surprise, especially for those who had not retrieved ashes before:

> I picked him up in [March]. And I found him in this massive jar. "Yes, [the employee said] he was rather large." Three-and-a-half kilos! (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne, 53)

Although the quantity of ash was more a surprise than a challenge for some, it did present the bereaved with some unexpected decisions. Thus, although people had prepared for the retrieval, and had decided upon the form(s) of disposal, the actual circumstances sometimes required creativity around the initial disposal plan:

> My mum is no longer complete. Everyone got a piece [of her ashes]. My father, brother […] So we divided it [and all picked small urns or ash jewellery], but then there was so much left. We then decided to scatter her near the chapel, because she loved to spend time there. The municipality did not approve it, but we did it anyway. What else could we do with all that ash? (Interview recently bereaved, Marja, 50)

Furthermore, for some bereaved the post-mortem relationship with the deceased made the ash retrieval complex. During one of the interviews, Yvonne gave a

detailed account of the strong presence of her brother in her home after the funeral, which made her feel both comfortable and uncomfortable, even haunted, at the same time. When it became possible to retrieve the ashes from the crematorium, she did not want to have his remains nearby.

> [Tim] was very present in the home […]. When I felt desperate, he would tell me that everything would be all right. Exactly like he used to. And then he was standing there, smiling. It made me angry. I turned my back because I did not want to see him laughing anymore. […] Then, the next problem occurred. Tim was about to come home in a jar. But I didn't want him at home. I was really not going to. […] No, the idea of placing him here … and I would start staring at it. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne, 53)

Her account not only illustrates that the ashes have an ambiguous materiality and agency, describing them as 'him' and 'it', it also shows that human remains can prompt ambiguous experiences and challenges among the bereaved. The ashes confront the living with the deceased's absence, as well as with his or her (un)expected presence, allowing for both experiences to oscillate. Although many people have ideas about the destination of human ashes, the reality of being confronted with one's deceased 'in a jar' might be quite different than anticipated. The ashes may present a 'problem' to the bereaved that has to be dealt with.

5.2 Finding a time and place to dispose

The ashes not only pose challenges to the bereaved because of their confrontational nature and because of the absence of a relatively fixed ritual repertoire, but also because the bereaved wish to treat the ashes in a respectful way. People wish to do it 'right'. The cremated remains become an object of solicitude embedded in practices of the bereaved. The relationships with the remains of the deceased illustrate a concern for both the final, as well as the temporal, destination of ashes among the bereaved. Thus, not only the final resting place of the deceased matters, but also what happens to (the ashes of) the deceased until that time. Thereby, the wishes of the deceased and the situation of the bereaved play a role:

> My wife wanted to be scattered near the place where she grew up, and where Nan was scattered as well. […] It was her final wish, but I wanted to keep her close at first. And I did not want to rush things. The last time we drove there we took her back home. (Interview recently bereaved, Johan, 59)

By "not wanting to rush things" Johan expresses a discourse of care in which comfort can be found and through which significance is given to the remains (Valentine 2008, 130, 156). The relationship with the cremated remains thus grows and changes over time. This emphasises that the bereaved are not only taking care of the deceased and the remains in the actual disposal practices, but also in the decision-making processes that occur before people remove the ashes from the crematorium, or give them a final destination. The story of Anna, who we've already mentioned, further illuminates this:

> I don't want to keep him in an urn with me […]. And my husband was a walker. [So I have decided] to scatter him in the park, close to the woods, so he can keep on walking there. I'm not looking forward to scattering his ashes. Actually it is an unpleasant idea. But it's just an idea, you know, that he walks there. (Of course it is not real). It means … Yes, to get rid of the ashes. […] But he used to love it. Also, a lot of our family members lie there and I always make a story out of it, like: "Go and have a talk with [your brother], perhaps you will find each other." (Interview recently bereaved, Anna, 77)

Anna's account shows that the post-death identity of the deceased, as well as her husband's relationships with the other dead, are fundamental in the process of finding a resting place for his ashes. Although she has not yet performed the scattering, she is already attaching meaning to the practice and space of scattering by creating a narrative in which her husband can continue to walk and will be reunited with other family members. Although Anna repeatedly says that her ideas about her husband being present somewhere are "of course not real", the realness of it seems irrelevant. It is overshadowed by the meaning of transcending the here and now, by doing justice to her husband, and by constructing a narrative of symbolic immortality.

Not all people retrieve the ashes from the crematorium. Not retrieving the ashes does not necessarily mean that people don't care, although it might be true for some people that the ashes don't have meaning in the sense that they are merely viewed as a residue, as we also saw in relation to the care given to the body of the deceased. Other reasons to not pick up the ashes at the crematorium are diverse. People don't know what to do with the cremated remains, family-members do not agree upon the mode of disposal, or people are extending the time before saying their final goodbye. Also, some people prefer that the ash disposal is conducted by professionals. Despite handing the ashes over to the professionals, the bereaved also express concerns about the cremated remains:

> I did not want to be present at the scattering. Also, I didn't want an urn or [something] with his ashes. No fuss. [But what happened] was very unfortunate. They forgot to tell me when [my husband] would be scattered, so they set him free without me knowing. […] It was very sad. I would have loved to be with him in my mind. (Interview recently bereaved, Bettie, 84)

Thus, the bereaved not only express care towards the cremated remains during the disposal itself, but also before a final destination is found, whether by leaving the ashes under the care of professionals or by finding a temporal place themselves. The ashes are entangled in social relationships, with the living as well as the dead, and the identity of the deceased strongly determines the appropriateness of the place and time to dispose of the ashes. As such, the ashes evoke a sense of moral obligation (Hertz 1970/1907, 27): a social obligation emerges to care for the ashes, as well as a moral obligation to do so in the correct way (cf. Davies 2000, 98). While deciding on a fitting destination for the remains the deceased and the bereaved find themselves in a liminal phase (Prendergast et al. 2010), awaiting the final reintegration of the deceased (Heessels 2012). This ambiguity – of both the ashes and the social status – possibly explains the neutral attitudes towards the cremated remains among our survey respondents.

5.3 Ritualising distance and proximity

Because of their ambiguity – as a portable (in)animate person-object that shares in the power of the deceased – the ashes themselves provide a means to negotiate the confrontation with the absence–presence of the deceased that is evoked by the remains (Maddrell 2013). Their ability to make the absent present, and the present absent, increases their symbolic efficacy (Krmpotich, Fontein & Harries 2010). The materiality of ashes not only creates possibilities to keep the human remains, and hence the deceased, in near proximity, but also provides ways to create and reinforce distance between the living and the dead. Our survey showed that cremated remains are less highly valued by people who scatter them. However, this does not necessarily imply that the relationship is altogether empty of meaning. The practice of scattering has the potential to create significant places for the dead:

> No, I didn't want [him at home]. He is in my heart. I thought: he has to go to Italy, to Lake Garda. […] He always loved the ocean so I said: "Go swimming. You have your freedom back. You have to go. Really, you have to get out of that tube." […] Beautiful isn't it? […] If you look at the lake,

> you can see what a wonderful view he has. He is celebrating his holiday in Italy. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne, 53)

Although Yvonne described her initial encounter with Tim's remains as problematic, we see that the ashes become meaningful to her because of their potential to create freedom. By creating a space for Tim's ashes, she relocates her brother and the focus for memory and continuing relationships to a place outside of the home, rebalancing his overt presence in her everyday life. Thus, through the disposal of his ashes, Tim is incorporated into the world of the living, however, not into the everyday world of Yvonne. Moreover, the interview fragment illustrates that the act of scattering gives Yvonne the possibility of fulfilling her brother's wishes. Before Tim fell ill, he had always loved to swim and had dreamt of spending his old age in Italy. The effects of surgery and chemotherapy took that away from him and his sister. By scattering the ashes, Yvonne is able to retrospectively restore her brother's identity (Davies 2002, 141). At the same time, however, as we will examine in more detail in chapter 6, only part of Tim reaches a final destination through the scattering of his ashes, as the power of Tim's identity is incorporated in other objects in the home as well.

We have seen that cremated remains have social lives of their own, as they are embedded in material practices and entangled in social relationships (Kopytoff 1986; Hallam 2010). They can evoke dynamic bonds between the living and the dead. Becoming dead takes time, and the cremated remains allow the bereaved to ritualise sequential separations from the deceased through accumulative practices (Laqueur 2015; Miller & Parrot 2009). This not only occurs through the act of scattering the ashes, but is also enacted by moving objects with the cremated remains through spaces. As the ashes cross territorial boundaries, incorporation may gradually take place (Van Gennep 1960, 153–154). By relocating the ash objects, parts of the deceased are re-incorporated in particular places, either near or away from the everyday world of the living (cf. Heessels 2012). When the bereaved grant the ashes new places in their everyday environment, a notion of temporality emerges. One of the interviewees, for example, described a pendant that was made of her mother's ashes. She wore the necklace for months:

> But at one point … It just didn't feel comfortable anymore. […] I had to take her off […] I don't know, I was standing in front of the mirror and I was thinking, what are you doing? Always wearing your mother? I took her

> off and never wore her again. […] When I really want to be close to her, I have the necklace. That is really something of my mum. Literally, I can wear her ashes. But for now she is standing there [on the cabinet]. (Interview recently bereaved, Marja, 50)

By taking off the necklace and placing it on the cabinet, Marja creates a reversible distance between herself and her mother, and incorporates part of her in a new place in the home. Keeping the cremated remains in proximity then allows for an open-ended process of ritualising (Seremetakis 1991, 2). This raises the question whether a final destination for the cremated remains can truly be found. Being incorporated in portable objects, which subsequently can be integrated in particular places, the ashes – and hence the deceased – can continue to be relocated through space. Therefore, people's responses to cremated remains are not only ambiguous in the initial encounters. When kept in near proximity, the ashes continue to have the power to grant the deceased an alternative social life, influencing people's attitudes and situational beliefs, and evoking a sense of the presence or absence of the deceased.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn attention to the diverse practices, attitudes, and experiences of recently bereaved Dutch people in relation to cremation and the cremated remains of their deceased. The survey data, interviews, and participant observations have shown that people's attitudes towards human ashes are less straightforward than is often assumed. In particular, questions were raised by the moderate value ascribed to cremated remains by our respondents. People did not evidently identify the ashes as being something important that should be singularised, or as an object that brings them in touch with their deceased. In fact, among the religiously unaffiliated respondents, of whom over eighty percent were involved in a cremation, these qualities of the ashes were evaluated as slightly negative. The results suggest that human remains not only allow people to make sense of death and are a means to manage one's changing relationship with the deceased, but they also present challenges. Various elements in the process of death ritual were studied to further explore people's ambiguous attitudes towards the ashes of their deceased.

On examining the motives behind respondents choosing a particular type of disposal during the funeral preparations, the wishes of the deceased were identified as the most important. The possibilities surrounding ash disposal and the absence of grave maintenance were additional reasons for choosing a

cremation, whereas having a place to visit, as well as the importance of natural symbolism, were prominent motives for opting for a burial. These motives also influenced the value that people ascribed to the ashes and the grave. The ashes were seen as more valuable among those who opted for a cremation because of the disposal possibilities, and the grave was particularly important to those who wanted to have a place for visiting their dead. Accounts of the interviews showed that decisions regarding the type of disposal had often already been made when the deceased was still alive, having been discussed in his or her intimate social circle. The deceased, thereby, strongly took the wishes of the bereaved into account, and the bereaved we interviewed also showed a concern for their own social environment in relation to their own future bodily disposal. Overall, we observed that multiple motives underlie the choice between a burial and cremation, which together allow the bereaved to create a meaningful narrative in relation to disposal practices.

Following the trajectory of death ritual, attention was then drawn to witnessing the incineration, which is an emerging ritual practice in the Netherlands. Of our respondents, 14 percent had witnessed the placement of the coffin in the cremation chamber. Although this practice was highly valued, and many people emphasised their wish to guide the deceased all the way to the end, where, in some cases, ritual criticism towards the end of the ceremony in the auditorium was expressed, we also showed that the 'to witness or not to witness' question, as well as the actual practice of witnessing, can lead to challenges. What it means to witness, or not, is unclear to many, and the bereaved do not often know what to expect when witnessing the cremation. Funeral professionals emphasised the importance of guiding the bereaved through this process, but simultaneously disagreed – on the basis of various arguments – whether witnessing the cremation can comfort the bereaved or not. The bivariate analysis showed that the bereaved who witness the incineration ascribe a higher value to the cremated remains, suggesting a more intimate relationship with them. Further research can improve our understanding of the increasing possibilities of crematoria in the Netherlands.

Subsequently, it was illustrated that scattering the remains and creating ash objects were the two most common forms of ash disposal among our respondents. Furthermore, one third of our respondents planned to dispose of the ashes in more than one way. Bivariate analyses showed that people who choose forms of ash disposal through which the deceased is kept in near proximity ascribe a higher value to the cremated remains. People who scatter the remains

ascribe a lower value to the ashes. Elaborating on this, from our qualitative material, we demonstrated that low appreciation of the cremated remains does not equal meaninglessness. Rather, it suggests that different qualities of the ashes are emphasised among the bereaved, depending on the particular situation, and providing an explanation for the moderate and slightly negative attitudes towards the ashes that were found in the survey. Whereas for some bereaved the dead matter was important as an object that allows for continued attachment, for others the qualities of freedom and portability were more meaningful. Rather than the dead matter itself, the means to create valuable places for the deceased was significant.

Further exploring the complex relationship of the bereaved with the ashes of their deceased, it was illustrated that the reality of encountering the cremated remains can be confrontational and different to what was expected. This became evident in people's initial encounters with the cremated remains, but also came to the fore in the aftermath of the ash retrieval, when people have to find a proper form, place, and time to dispose of them. Since both the temporal and final destination of human ashes are important to people, the cremated remains evoke a discourse of care and become an object of solicitude that raises moral and social obligations. Thereby, the ambiguous qualities of the ashes – being an in(animate) person-object – continue to evoke ambiguous experiences among the bereaved. As long as the ashes are kept in near proximity, they render the absence, as well as the presence, of the deceased visible. At the same time, and precisely because of their liminal qualities, the ashes are used to negotiate the absence–presence that they evoke among the bereaved. Through the movement of ashes, the bereaved can create proximity as well as distance between themselves and their deceased, (re)incorporating parts of the deceased into this world, or separating parts of the deceased from particular places. Thereby, the presence of the ashes allows for an open-ended process of ritualising, which will be further explored in chapter 6. In sum, we have seen that, although many people experience intense and physical relationships with the remains, finding an appropriate way to deal with the ashes of one's deceased is no easy matter.

PART II

BEREAVEMENT

CHAPTER 5

RE-IMAGINING AFTERLIFE BELIEFS

EXPLORING ATTITUDES AND VOCABULARIES OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

In view of the changing role of religion, the question arises as to whether and how afterlife beliefs are expressed and lived by recently bereaved people today. Research has illustrated a decline in traditional and uniform concepts of life after death among religiously unaffiliated and Roman Catholic Dutch people, and, although less severe, among those with a Protestant affiliation (Quartier 2007; Wojtkowiak 2011). Furthermore, attention has already been drawn to the prominent role of personal identity and notions of the post-self as a source for afterlife beliefs, resulting in the presence of personalised, implicit, and fragmented notions of post-mortem existence (Wojtkowiak 2011). The lived eschatology of Muslims in the Netherlands has also been elaborately examined, emphasising the dynamics between religious meta-narratives and the actual (migration) context wherein people make sense of a death (Venhorst 2013). Although it has been illustrated that the influence of Christian meta-narratives among ecclesial and non-ecclesial Dutch has declined, no attention has been paid to the interaction of traditional and non-traditional afterlife imagery, and the ways in which beliefs about life after death are re-imagined, that is, how conceptions are formed and reshaped on the basis of one's imagination and situation. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the lived afterlife beliefs as articulated by the dearest and nearest bereaved. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the interplay of tradition and innovation in lived notions of life after death in the Netherlands.[1] Drawing on survey research and qualitative interviews, our aim is to answer the following question: *what notions of symbolic immortality can be found in the attitudes and narratives of the recently bereaved?*

By drawing attention to the relevant key concepts, this chapter will first be situated in the overall framework of the study (§2). Thereby particular attention will be given to the notion of lived eschatology and the theological mode of symbolic immortality, which together allow us to study the interplay of tradition and innovation. After some methodological remarks (§3), we will quantitatively explore people's attitudes towards life after death (§4). Based on survey re-

[1] Parts of this chapter were published in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* (Mathijssen 2014).

search, we will examine whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated respondents, who recently lost a loved one, identify with traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs. Furthermore, we will explore how people's attitudes regarding the afterlife relate to their social location and to the characteristics of the funeral in which they participated. The quantitative examination of people's notions of life after death provides us with a direction to qualitatively illustrate the ways in which afterlife beliefs are re-imagined in narratives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated bereaved (§5). Drawing on data from interviews, we will explore the vocabularies that people use to articulate afterlife beliefs. We will conclude with some final remarks and an overview of the results (§6).

1 Key concepts: Ritual practice and ritual meaning

Throughout this study we have drawn attention to the interplay of ritual practice and ritual meaning, emphasising that practices and meanings induce, shape, and reinforce one another. During the preparation and performance of funerary practices, for instance, symbols of a continued form of post-mortem existence were profound. Also, in relation to cremation, it was illustrated that certain beliefs and motivations inspire the bereaved to conduct the ash disposal in a specific way. Furthermore, it was shown that the performance of the disposal itself reinforces and induces beliefs, specifically regarding the presence of the deceased, and subsequently evokes further practices. Through a variety of practices and beliefs that emerge during the funeral process, the recently bereaved seek, create, and take meaning (Holloway et al. 2013), whereby they symbolically construct a connection beyond the lifespan of the deceased. These expressions were not only a general 'human response' to mortality, but also became a situational force against the particular, individual death itself (Davies 2015, 25).

In this chapter, as well as in chapter 6, we will draw attention to notions of continued existence that appear in the aftermath of the funeral ceremony. We will, thus, continue to follow the trajectory of death ritual, by looking at traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs that emerge during the period of bereavement.[2] In this chapter, we are predominantly interested in ritual meaning and will explore whether and how people identify with beliefs about the ongo-

[2] As we have explained in the introduction, grief, mourning, and bereavement are not limited to the period after the funeral, but can occur before the funeral, as well as before biological death. We focus on the 'period of bereavement', however, to emphasise that ritual practices and ritual meaning are not demarcated to the funerary practices, but play a profound role in the period of bereavement that continues beyond the funeral.

ing existence of their deceased. Moreover, we aim to illustrate how the bereaved articulate such beliefs in view of the situation at hand, and in light of shifting circumstances in society. Thereby, particular attention will be given to the changing role of religion. Speaking of an afterlife, it is, after all, religious concepts that most readily come to mind. In the next chapter we will focus on ritual practice as well as ritual meaning, specifically individualised incorporation rites, whereby we will emphasise the dynamics of the performance of afterlife beliefs (cf. Day 2010). In both chapters, images of immortality are understood as being situational and dynamic, depending on the status of the deceased at a specific moment in time, as well as on the context of the prolonged process of death ritual (Suzuki 2000, 18).

1.1 Lived afterlife beliefs

Responding to death's disruptive force, people express afterlife beliefs. In this study, afterlife beliefs are understood as inevitably lived and situational (Venhorst 2013, 72; McGuire 2008), and are defined as symbolic expressions that can point to a form of continued existence of the deceased (cf. Lifton & Olson 2004). This understanding implies that afterlife beliefs have a temporal, spatial, and social dimension. Afterlife beliefs include temporal notions of the deceased's continued existence after death (the afterlife), spatial notions of places where the dead reside (the afterworld), and notions of social relationships between the living and the dead (Honkasalo, Koski & Kanerva 2015, 5; Bennett & Bennett 2000). Afterlife beliefs are always shaped by the context in which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences, thereby allowing them to make sense of life and death. Being situated in the Dutch context, such notions of life beyond death are also influenced by the dynamics of the religious and cultural meta-narratives that flourish in Dutch society. Therefore, as this chapter will emphasise, lived afterlife beliefs relate to situational circumstances as well as to the changing role of Christian tradition. Traditional beliefs are marginalised, endorsed, and re-imagined, and oscillate with non-traditional afterlife beliefs.

The outlook of afterlife beliefs, as they can be found in contemporary meta-narratives and liturgical formats, is strongly shaped by the domain of eschatology. Generally, this domain grapples with questions concerning 'the last things' (*eschatos)* at a collective and personal level (Quartier 2009a, 416–420). It also refers to a branch of theology that tackles the question of human fate after death. Eschatological thinking, thus, includes ideas about the end of time in

a cosmological sense, such as the fate of humanity and Judgement Day, as well as ideas about the end of life in a personal sense, such as the fate of the individual after death (Walker 2000, 5). These collective and personal dimensions are closely related to one another, as our individual fate depends on the fate of humankind and the world (Scheffler 2013, 81). Although one could conceptually argue that these two dimensions cannot be separated, this study confines itself to personal eschatology for two reasons. First and foremost, this is the dimension that is of the greatest importance to the recently bereaved. In their narratives, as we will come to illustrate in more detail, they relate ideas regarding the afterlife predominantly to the fate of their deceased. Second, we focus on the personal dimension because we are interested in "lived eschatology", that is, the practices, experiences, and expressions of ordinary survivors with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated background (Venhorst 2013, 72).

1.2 Theological symbolic immortality

To examine lived afterlife beliefs, we will strongly draw on the concept of *symbolic immortality* (Lifton & Olson 1974/2004), as we have described it in our introduction. The diverse dimensions of symbolic immortality allow us to build a bridge between traditional meta-narratives and lived experiences and meaning-making practices. As we are interested in the changing role of religion and the interplay of tradition and innovation, particular attention will be given to the theological mode of symbolic immortality in the context of loss. Lifton and Olson describe this mode in relation to the idea of spiritual rebirth, that is, one's reorientation in relation to time and death. In the face of death, they point out, religions emphasise that life is not insignificant. Death releases one from profane existence in the here and now, after which life is regenerated "on a more intense and meaningful plane" (Lifton & Olson 1974, 79–80). Thereby, the individual is connected to the principal of eternity. It is to this principle that religious images symbolically appeal (Chidester 2002, 18–19).

In this study we will look at the interplay of traditional afterlife beliefs, which are related to the theological mode of symbolic immortality, and non-traditional afterlife beliefs, which are related to the other modes of symbolic immortality. Regardless of the specific mode, these beliefs have temporal, spatial, and social characteristics. To explore the dynamics of traditional afterlife beliefs and non-traditional afterlife beliefs, we will first discuss how the principal of eternity is symbolised within Christian tradition, and how such symbol-

ism relates to contemporary practice. It is not our concern whether these images are 'real'; neither do we aim to give an all-inclusive, systematic overview of Christian eschatology. Rather, we will focus on two concepts that are prominent in eschatological thinking in general, in Christian thinking in particular, and in contemporary funerary and bereavement practices: the future resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul.

Although agreement exists regarding the idea that life, rather than death, has the last word in Christian thinking, the way in which life's victory will occur remains indeterminate (Boismard 1995). Generally, however, it falls into two lines of thought (Quartier 2009a). In the first view, only the immaterial ultimate principle, the 'soul', continues to exist after death while the body diminishes. In the second line of thought, the whole person continues to exist: the immaterial 'soul' and the material (transformed) 'body'. The notions of the material body and the immaterial soul provide us with a starting point to explore re-imagined notions of life after death.

1.2.1 The material body

In contemporary death rites, as well as in Christian tradition, great value is ascribed to the body of the deceased. The presence of the dead body evokes ritual practice, and the body itself can become a vehicle for notions of continued existence (cf. Hertz 1907/1960; Metcalf 1982, 95). Although the body has fulfilled a prominent role in funerary practices throughout history, notions of the body are dynamic and have changed profoundly over time as they are culturally embedded in a context (Janssen & Verheggen 1997, 303). In the contemporary Dutch context, as we have illustrated in chapters 2 to 4, we can observe increasingly individualised ways of giving attention to the body. The role of the body in relation to expressing the individual identity of the deceased comes evidently to the fore in the ways wherein the dead body is washed, dressed, and approached, and is further enhanced by possibilities to keep the dead within near proximity. Through the legislation of thanatopraxy in 2010, a light form of embalming, the dead body can stay at home without cooling facilities in a prolonged human-like state. Also, through the possibility of renting a 'mourning chamber' for a lengthy period the recently bereaved can be granted 24/7 access to the dead body, and personal goods are regularly placed in the coffin to accompany the deceased; these vary from drawings, stuffed animals, and letters to golf clubs and boxing gloves.

We have also seen that the dead body acquires a prominent role in the funeral arrangements and in the funeral ceremony, as people have to choose between two forms of bodily disposal: cremation or burial.[3] The increased number of cremations has particularly raised questions regarding the value and meaning of the body of the deceased, and it has paved the way for cremation and post-cremation ritualisations of survivors, as well as of professionals (Heessels 2012). The diversity of ash objects and ways of ash disposal, as well as the increased witnessing of the cremation, are examples of this. Cremation has altered the form of continued existence after death and, as such, has left its mark on afterlife beliefs. Through the existence of cremated remains, the dead no longer only reside in the graveyard, but have become portable and have acquired places in the world of the living. Notions of continued existence in general have become more strongly linked with the everyday material world (Wojtkowiak 2011, 144), partly as a result of the stronger prominence of human remains, but also because people have become more actively involved in processes of decision-making and practices surrounding the dead body.

Bodily symbolism also plays a fundamental role in the theological dimension of symbolic immortality. Looking at ways of transcending death in Christian tradition, the idea of future bodily resurrection readily presents itself. This notion has major collective eschatological connotations, being related to Judgement Day and the coming of the Kingdom of God when the dead will be brought back to life, and reunited with their glorified, transformed body (Pannenberg 2007, 1; Westhelle 2012, 27). Corresponding with the theological and liturgical renewal taking place in Roman Catholic and Protestant churches during the second half of the 20th century, hope regarding resurrection, in this collective eschatological sense, became increasingly prominent in Dutch ecclesial funerary rites (Hermans 2011; *Nationale Raad voor Liturgie* 1976; *Redactie Dienstboek* 2004). Although a fundamental concept in Christian eschatology, the coming Kingdom of God is highly abstract to many people and is often situated in a distant time. For many who lose someone, it is, at the very least, hard to grasp (Pattison 2015, 1), and therefore symbolic forms and acts are needed to bridge the gap between the actual present death and the cosmological notion of eternity. Regarding the fate of the deceased individual, therefore, it is not so much the Kingdom of God itself, but rather the hope for eternal life at an individual level that has become profound in ecclesial funerary practices (*Nationale*

[3] There are a few other options too, such as donating the body, but these will not be taken into account.

Raad voor Liturgie 1976; *Redactie Dienstboek* 2004). At the individual level this hope is expressed, mediated, and made tangible through bodily symbolism in the here and now, resembling an ambiguity of the body that can also be found in relation to the Kingdom of God.

The notion of ambiguity is of great importance in understanding the symbolism of, and practices around, the body, and it allows us to connect Christian tradition with lived afterlife beliefs. In Christianity, as in other major religious traditions, the psychical body is valued in terms of the afterlife. However, throughout history, as well as in contemporary practices, we find the notion that bodily resurrection does not merely point to a body in a literal, biological sense, like the one we inhabit during our lives. No text in the Old or New Testaments, for instance, speaks solely of the literal resurrection of such a body (Boismard 1995, viii). Corporeality is fundamental but points to both the continuity and discontinuity between this life and the hereafter. Furthermore, it demonstrates the power of God to transform life in body and soul (Chidester 2002, 172). As such, the body is of great importance in terms of both the attributes of God, and the individual person who is incomplete without it (Weren 2010, 187–191). Rather than the idea that the corpse will rise and literally walk out of the grave in *this world*, which sometimes seems to be the way in which resurrection is interpreted and subsequently disagreed with (De Jong & Kregting 2008; Burris & Bailey 2009), the body is seen as a form to indicate what it means to be a person in the fullest sense. We find an anticipation towards reunion with the same, recognisable physical body, which simultaneously might be transfigured (Chidester 2002, 213). Thus, in life after death a person is incomplete without a body, but the post-mortem body is similar to, as well as fundamentally different from, the earthly one. We have seen that this ambiguity of continuity and discontinuity, relating to personhood and the dead body, strongly came to the fore in the care that is given to the corpse, as well as in contemporary practices surrounding the cremated remains. We suggest that it also plays a role regarding afterlife beliefs.[4] We will explore this further through quantitative and qualitative data, which allows us to look at people's agreement with traditional and non-traditional 'resurrection-terminology', and people's articulations of continuity and discontinuity in relation to material afterlife beliefs. First, however, we will describe the second line of thought, relating to the soul.

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[4] This ambiguity also came to the fore in the care that is given to the body of the deceased and the remains, as described in chapters 2 to 4.

1.2.3 The immaterial soul

In contemporary funerary practices, the identity of the deceased is often linked to a notion of the soul, a spirit, or an immaterial ultimate principle that continues to exist beyond death. Again we wonder what images are to be found in Christian tradition, and how they relate to contemporary practice. The notion of some kind of soul has been practically universal, although it is influenced by the context in which it is situated (Davies 2008, 60). It might therefore not come as a surprise, in contrast to the belief in resurrection, that people cherish the idea of an immortal soul (Bremmer 2009; Burris & Bailey 2009; Quartier 2007; De Jong & Kregting 2008). Although the notion of the body is of importance in Christian thinking, as we have discussed, it is often seen as a way to express the person as a whole, and, as such, can be understood as a vehicle for the imperilled soul that should be taken care of as regards the afterlife (Howarth 2007, 188). The flesh, as such, is temporal, mortal, and diminishes with death and is not recognised as the essence of the person that will survive death (Bregman 2011; Webster 2009).

In Christian meta-narratives the soul is often thought to be 'in heaven', 'in God's presence', or 'with Jesus' (Davies 2008, 59). The notion of the soul or spirit that people have today, however, is more strongly related to the individual life of the deceased. "The soul is the self at its very root, the self in its most complete sense" (Grimes 2000, 347), and the ways in which we describe the self are determined by the life that has been lived. The notion of soul has thus been individualised today, and, as a result, not only refers to immortality in another realm, but also to a form of continued existence in the here and now. This evidently came to the fore in our description of contemporary funerals, in which the individual identity of the deceased takes centre stage. The life of the deceased is celebrated and transcended. It becomes *the* connecting theme in the ceremony, and it provides a basis for notions of continued existence. Looking at the interplay of tradition and innovation, this raises a pertinent question. Does today's emphasis on the remembrance and the survival of the essence of the individual's life, often understood as characteristics and examples of one's personality and relationships, do justice to the idea of the immortal soul?

For at least three reasons, a link between the notion of soul and the individual might be problematic. First, as we have clearly seen with the notion of resurrection, it is often thought that the afterlife is unlike our present life. Stressing the earthly characteristics and attributes of the deceased as they have developed during life, by contrast, does not seem utterly different from this world.

However, we should take into account that concepts of the hereafter are often described in analogy with earthly terms, as a metaphor that substitutes our lack of knowledge (Webster 2009). Symbols of immortality are capable of transcending human restraints (Riis & Woodhead 2010). Individualised notions of symbolic immortality, particularly the soul, among survivors may therefore not be as similar to qualities of earthly life as they seem, but, rather, restore a sense of control by expressing the inexpressible (Adamson & Holloway 2013). We will explore this by drawing attention to people's vocabularies in the qualitative part of this chapter.

Second, the emphasis on the deceased may have a stronger connotation with memory than with the soul (Wojtkowiak 2011). This immediately brings up the third issue, namely, how does a form of continued existence after death in this world relate to otherworldly notions of the afterlife? The concept of symbolic immortality allows us to bridge these gaps, as it determines our focus is on the act of transcending, rather than on the attributes of the transcendent. Therefore, we can study a variety of images of life after death as being part of the same meaning-making process of the recently bereaved. Furthermore, commemorating and celebrating one's deceased not only involve memory, but also concern images of the deceased's post-mortem identity. These images are culturally transcended, expressing an ongoing sense of self of the deceased. As such, they create continuity beyond the individual lifespan. In ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerary practices, for instance, one can observe that communicative memory alone does not always satisfy the needs of survivors (Assmann 1992). In addition to an emphasis on the individuality of the deceased, the notions of hope and social meaning play a major role (Quartier 2007; see chapter 3). Herein, people find comfort, strength, and meaning in light of the future. Ritual practices provide a framework for expressing "words against death", alleviating the cultural and social identities of the deceased individual, whether deemed as a memory or a living entity.

1.3 Research questions

In this chapter we will be investigating people's attitudes, as well as their vocabularies, in relation to life after death. On the basis of quantitative data, we will first study attitudes towards life after death among our respondents. Can we distinguish different types or dimensions of afterlife beliefs, and to what extent do people identify with such beliefs? Second, on the basis of qualitative data, we will study how afterlife beliefs are articulated and re-imagined in narratives

of the recently bereaved. Thereby, particular emphasis will be placed on the changing role of religion.

2 Methods

This chapter draws on our semi-structured interviews with the recently bereaved (n=15), and the conducted survey research (n=198). As we have described the characteristics and procedures of our methods earlier, we will only draw attention to the measurement instruments and quantitative data analyses that are of relevance for this chapter.

2.1 Measuring instruments and data analysis

Several items were included in the questionnaire regarding traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs. With 'traditional afterlife beliefs', we refer to the notion of theological symbolic immortality as it is expressed in the meta-narratives of Christian tradition and in ecclesial liturgical formats (*Redactie Dienstboek*, *Raad voor de Liturgie*). Non-traditional afterlife beliefs refer to expressions of ongoing existence that can be found in the other modes of symbolic immortality – biological/social, creative, and natural, as well as the material mode that we have added to the concept. Non-traditional afterlife beliefs can, of course, be understood as being traditional too, for example, in the sense that they have proven to be time-honoured customs. However, unlike notions of the soul and bodily resurrection, they are not exclusively understood in relation to Christian tradition in the Dutch context.

TABLE 5.1 CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS

	TRADITIONAL	**NON-TRADITIONAL**
"MATERIAL BODY"	RESURRECTION AND CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE DECEASED THROUGH THE BODY	CONTINUED PHYSICAL EXISTENCE IN THE WORLD OF THE BEREAVED, FOR EXAMPLE, THROUGH OFFSPRING AND ACQUAINTANCES, THROUGH WORKS AND OBJECTS OF THE DECEASED, AND THROUGH INCORPORATION OF THE BODY IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE BEREAVED
"IMMATERIAL SOUL"	ONGOING EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL OR SPIRIT OF THE DECEASED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN HEAVEN	ONGOING IMMATERIAL EXISTENCE OF THE SELF OR PERSONHOOD OF THE DECEASED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE BEREAVED

In the questionnaire respondents were given six statements on traditional notions of life after death, as well as six statements on non-traditional notions, and they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements using a five-point scale (1= fully disagree, 5= fully agree). We formulated the statements on the basis of our qualitative material and earlier research (Quartier 2007; see appendix C), whereby material notions of the body and immaterial notions of the soul were included in statements of both traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the concepts.

As regards procedure, we first conducted two factor analyses (Principal Axis Factoring, see appendix F). Subsequently, we conducted bivariate analyses between the distinguished factors and some personal and funeral characteristics. In this way we further explored the associations between personal characteristics and traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs.

3 Attitudes towards traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs

In line with our expectations the factor analysis on non-traditional afterlife beliefs resulted in two factors: *Non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs* (α.85) and *Non-traditional material afterlife beliefs* (α.62). Each factor consists of three items. In relation to non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs, the items represented a personalised notion of the soul, referring to the belief that an immaterial principle of the deceased lives on in the hearts, memories, or thoughts of the bereaved. In relation to non-traditional material afterlife beliefs, the items represent a personalised notion of an ongoing physical existence of the deceased in the world of the bereaved. Here, the presence of the deceased is experienced by the living in their environment through works, offspring, and acquaintances, and via material objects. Our respondents positively agreed with both dimensions, as the results in Table 5.2 indicate.

TABLE 5.2 MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS IN THE NETHERLANDS

FACTOR	MEAN
NON-TRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	4.6 (.55)
NON-TRADITIONAL MATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	3.8 (.78)
TRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	3.2 (1.08)
TRADITIONAL BODILY AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	2.4 (.98)

NOTE: N=191; SDS IN PARENTHESES

Subsequently, we examined traditional afterlife beliefs. Again two factors could be distinguished: *Traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs* (α.88) and *Traditional material afterlife beliefs* (α.83). The first factor consists of three items in which the existence of the soul, the afterlife, and the idea of heaven as an afterworld are emphasised. The notions of afterlife and afterworld thus combine in respondents' traditional representations. In relation to traditional material afterlife beliefs, the items refer to a physical bodily existence after death, as well as to the notion of resurrection. As the results in Table 5.2 show, we find a neutral, slightly positive agreement with traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs, and a disagreement with the traditional material afterlife beliefs.

3.1 Material afterlife beliefs: Bivariate analyses

To further understand our respondents' attitudes towards afterlife beliefs, we conducted bivariate analyses with personal characteristics of the respondents, as well as with features of the funerals in which they participated. In this section, we will draw attention to the associations in relation to traditional and non-traditional *material* afterlife beliefs.

Our bivariate analysis with *non-traditional material afterlife beliefs* resulted in six significant associations, four of which were weak (Table 5.3).[5] A moderate association can be found between respondents who value the remains of their deceased as more important, as sacred or special, and as a place that brings them in touch with the deceased. When we distinguish between valuing the grave (α.72) and valuing the cremated remains or urn (α.95), we find a very high association between material non-traditional afterlife beliefs and respondents who ascribe a higher value to the grave. A weak association becomes visible among respondents who attach greater value to the cremated remains. Together, this suggests that people who ascribe a higher value to human remains identify more strongly with the belief in a continued existence in this world, which calls for further qualitative exploration.

Furthermore, three significant but weak associations could be identified. Women (M=4.0, SD=.75) showed stronger positive values towards material non-traditional afterlife beliefs than did men (M=3.6, SD=.78). The same can be observed among respondents who lost their partner (M=4.0, SD=.73) compared to those who lost a parent (M=3.8, SD=.78). We also find a low significant as-

[5] In interpreting associations, we pursued the following rule of thumb: 0 to 0.1 very weak; 0.1 to 0.25 weak; 0.25 to 0.35 moderate; 0.35 to 0.45 strong; > 0.45 very strong.

sociation with Roman Catholic affiliation. Catholic respondents (M=3.9, SD=.74) agree more strongly with non-traditional material afterlife beliefs than those who are unaffiliated (M=3.7, SD=.83) and those who are Protestant (M=3.7, SD=.76). Although these characteristics influence people's material non-traditional afterlife beliefs, their impact is very small.

With regard to *traditional material afterlife beliefs*, the results show a very strong association with religiosity (Table 5.3). As expected, respondents who self-identify as being religious to a larger extent agree more strongly with notions of resurrection and a form of physical continued existence after death. Also, a very strong association was found with respondents with a Protestant background (M=3.3, SD=.81) compared to those respondents who are religiously unaffiliated (M=1.8, SD=.77). Catholics, too, agree more strongly with the dimension of traditional material afterlife beliefs (M= 2.5, SD=.90) compared to unaffiliated respondents. Agreement with traditional material afterlife beliefs also increased when the deceased had a Protestant affiliation. Furthermore, respondents who had participated in an ecclesial ceremony showed higher agree-

TABLE 5.3 SOCIAL LOCATION OF MATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL, FUNERAL-TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION; PARTNER; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS AND SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	NON-TRADITIONAL	TRADITIONAL
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
SEX (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.23**	-.26
AGE	.04	.18*
EDUCATION	-.08	-.10
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.15*	.38*
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.03	.63***
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.02	.04
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.08	.30**
RELIGIOSITY	.08	.58***
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.02	.37*
TYPE OF BODILY DISPOSAL (CREMATION VS. BURIAL)	.05	-.33**
REMAINS	.32***	.28***
GRAVE	.63***	.11
CREMATED REMAINS	.24**	.30**
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.21**	-.23

ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

ment (M= 2.6, SD=.99) in relation to those who had participated in a non-ecclesial funeral (M= 2.2, SD=.95). Overall, however, we only found a small agreement with traditional material afterlife beliefs among Protestant respondents and among respondents who self-identify as religious (M= 3.4, SD=.92).

Looking at the other characteristics, we can observe that people who have been involved in a cremation ceremony agree less with traditional material afterlife beliefs (M=2.2, SD=.91) than those who have been involved in a burial (M=2.7, SD=1.05). Interesting in this regard, is the moderate association with cremated remains. People who were involved in a cremation agree less with the traditional material dimension, but those who value the cremated remains as important and special, agree more with traditional material afterlife beliefs. Interestingly, we do not find an association with valuing the grave. Lastly, age has a weak influence. The older the respondents, the more likely they are to agree with traditional material afterlife beliefs.

3.2 Immaterial afterlife beliefs: Bivariate analyses

Regarding *non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs*, six significant associations can be observed in the results of our bivariate analysis (Table 5.4). The strongest association is found between non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs and the value that people attach to the grave. Respondents, who more strongly describe the grave as being important, as being special or sacred, and as a place that brings them in touch with the deceased, agree more with the non-traditional notion of the immaterial ongoing existence of their deceased. Interestingly, we do not find a significant association between non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs and the value that people ascribe to cremated remains. This is surprising as cremated remains are often treated as animate, as we have illustrated in chapter 4. However, we have also seen that people express highly ambiguous attitudes towards cremated remains, which is a possible explanation for the lack of association that we find here.

Further, the results show five significant but weak associations. A higher agreement with non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs can be identified among respondents who lost their partner (M= 4.8, SD=.33) compared to those who lost a parent (M=4.6, SD=.54), and respondents who are female (M=4.7, SD=.42) compared to those who are male (M=4.5, SD=.65). Respondents who identified as Roman Catholic also agree more strongly with the notion of non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs (M=4.7, SD=.38) than respondents who are religiously unaffiliated (M=4.6, SD=.65). Protestant respondents, on the

other hand, agree less with the notion of non-traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs than unaffiliated and, hence, Roman Catholic respondents (M=4.4, SD=.62). However, regardless of these associations with personal characteristics, there is a very high overall agreement with the notion that the personhood of the deceased lives on in an immaterial sense.

Regarding *traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs*, five significant associations can be found (Table 5.4). As expected, we find a very high association between the extent to which respondents self-identify as being religious and their agreement with traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs. Also, Protestant (M=4.1, SD=.83) and Catholic respondents (M=3.4, SD=.87) identify more strongly with traditional immaterial afterlife beliefs than unaffiliated respondents, who slightly disagree (M=2.7, SD=1.08). A positive association was also found with a Protestant affiliation of the deceased, compared to no religious affiliation, and, hence, with a Roman Catholic affiliated deceased. Respondents who were involved in a cremation (M=3.1, SD=1.08) agree less with the tradi-

TABLE 5.4. SOCIAL LOCATION OF IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL, FUNERAL-TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION; PARTNER; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) BETWEEN NON-TRADITIONAL AND TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS AND SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	NON-TRADITIONAL	TRADITIONAL
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
SEX (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.25**	-.35*
AGE	-.05	.08
EDUCATION	-.04	-.03
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.23**	.31*
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.31**	.44***
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.03	.05
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.08	.30**
RELIGIOSITY	-.06	.59***
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.21	.27
TYPE OF BODILY DISPOSAL (CREMATION VS. BURIAL)	.25	-.28**
REMAINS	.18*	.13
GRAVE	.37**	.04
CREMATED REMAINS	.14	.11
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.24**	.28

ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

tional immaterial afterlife beliefs compared to those who were involved in a burial (M=3.5, SD=1.02). Interestingly, we do not find any relevant associations in relation to human remains, suggesting that the remains affect this-worldly rather than other-worldly notions of immaterial continued existence. Lastly, a strong significant association is found with sex. Female respondents show higher agreement with traditional notions of the soul (M=3.4, SD=1.00) than male respondents (M=3.0, SD=1.13).

In sum, the results of our bivariate analyses show two groups of strong associations in relation to afterlife beliefs, which respectively will be further explored in the qualitative discussions below, as well as in the following chapter. First, we find higher agreement with traditional afterlife beliefs, such as the soul, heaven, and resurrection, among respondents who self-identify as being religious, respondents who are religiously affiliated, most notably among the group of Protestants, and respondents who participated in ecclesial funerals. Second, we find positive associations – though varying in strength – between afterlife beliefs and the value that is ascribed to human remains. This points to a connection between the presence of human remains and notions of life after death.

3.3 Re-imagined notions of symbolic immortality in narratives of the bereaved

Our quantitative results have suggested two main areas – the role of religion and the role of human remains – to further explore afterlife beliefs in practices and narratives of the recently bereaved. As such, we will be focusing on the diverse ways in which traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs are articulated in narratives of the bereaved, emphasising their exegetical meaning (Turner 1973). In the next chapter, we will draw attention to afterlife beliefs and human remains – both artificial and corporeal.

The results of our survey showed that respondents agreed more with non-traditional afterlife beliefs than with traditional ones. Agreement with traditional notions of heaven and the soul was only clearly found among respondents who described themselves as being religious and among those who were religiously affiliated. Furthermore, we found neutral and negative attitudes towards the idea of bodily resurrection. Although these numbers are telling in light of the changing role of religion in society and in individual lives, they don't evidence people's use of sources and vocabularies to describe a possible hereafter (or absence thereof), nor do they illustrate how notions of life after death are re-

imagined by the bereaved in particular contexts. Therefore, we will now draw attention to illustrations of symbolic immortality from our interviews with the recently bereaved. Although the boundaries between traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs are blurred in practice, and people draw on various sources and experiences to describe what will happen after death, we will move from traditional notions of life after death, showing a larger influence of religious meta-narratives, to non-traditional notions that are more dominantly framed by the everyday experiences of the bereaved.

3.4 Theological notions of symbolic immortality: The great mystery of death

In our theoretical framework we distinguished several modes of symbolic immortality. Regarding the theological mode, traditional notions of life after death could clearly be distinguished in the narratives of our Protestant and Roman Catholic interviewees. The way in which such notions occurred, however, was rather different than we had anticipated. The classical metaphors and images to transcend the individual self, such as heaven, paradise, or resurrection, were not as profound as expected, and if they played a role, they were employed as a tool to express the mystery of death among other images, rather than themselves being meaningful, independent illustrations. During one of the interviews, for example, Cor, a Protestant man in his 80s, told a story about the presence of his wife whom he had recently lost:

> [That clock] has to be wound up every twenty-four hours. And as I was sitting here, on the couch, I suddenly saw that the clock had already been wound up. This happened a few times. Of course I had wound up the clock myself, without thinking about it. I do not think that her spirit … Sometimes people say that the deceased are around you. I seriously doubt that …
>
> [Do you have any idea of where she is? Or what that looks like?]
>
> No, no. You can make up fantasies, but that makes little sense. You just have to let it happen. And, umm, perhaps our loving God will have some dubious notes on me, which will make him frown once I get there [laughs]. (Cor)

At various instances during the interview, Cor spoke of sensing his wife's presence at home. Not only involving the clock, but he continued to talk to her near a cabinet on which he had placed photographs of her and other family members. Also, he continued to lay the table for two in the morning. However, as we see

in the fragment, he does not feel that his wife is literally around him. At least he doubts such a possibility, suggesting a difference between his everyday environment where his wife's presence is tangible, and the 'real place' where she now resides. The fragment further indicates that Cor is convinced that there will be something after death, but to him it makes no sense to fill in what that something is as it is impossible to know. There is a "loving God", but Cor does not use any further metaphors to explain what could possibly happen. One just has to wait and see. Many of our respondents who expressed traditional images of theological symbolic immortality spoke in a similar way about life after death, and often more elaborately. Jan, a Protestant man in his 50s, gave the following account:

> Death is certain. But after death? You can believe in something, in the soul or in all kinds of ideas that people have about such a thing. But the fact is there is little said about it […]. We don't know anything. As our minister always says: it is one great mystery. And I would like to add that life is one big mystery. And death too, actually. And what happens after death even more so. We just don't know, and sometimes I find that difficult. To accept that we simply don't know, I mean. Things like heaven or paradise or eternal life ... If any of it is true, those things are difficult to grasp for us humans. We cannot imagine it, can we? I think we cannot ... So what we believe in is what we hope will happen. But no certainties can be found in the Bible. […] Even our origin is a mystery. I know a lot about astronomy and things like that, but the origin of life on earth is a miracle in itself, a pure coincidence. Or, well, perhaps not … (Jan)

To Jan, too, what happens after death is impossible to imagine. Because of the great mystery of death, one cannot state anything about "things like heaven or paradise or eternal life". In this fragment Jan draws on religious sources, both the Bible as well as the expertise of the minister. He notes that one believes in what one hopes will happen, but between the lines there is a sense of doubt, for example, in his expression "if any of it is true". He finds it difficult to accept that we cannot know, though there is a strong sense of belief at the same time. Analysing this dialogue made us wonder how Jan would have filled in our – or any other – questionnaire regarding notions of heaven, paradise, and eternal life. Would he agree because the concepts are in line with Christian thinking, or disagree, as these notions cannot grasp death's mystery? By asking questions about simplified notions of life after death, whether qualitatively or quantitatively, this fragment suggests that we – as researchers – do not do justice to the complexity of notions of life after death and the ability of people to articulate that com-

plexity. This should be taken into account in developing questionnaires in future research.

Later in the interview, after describing his own thoughts about the mystery of death in relation to his own interests, the Bible, and the minister that he refers to, Jan continues by explaining what his parents believed to be true:

> My parents did believe in something after death, yes. They used terms like heaven or paradise ... I think [those terms] mean the same thing. But if you want to fill in those terms, things remain vague. I mean, perhaps you will meet old acquaintances and loved ones in a different shape, but we don't know how. In a place with no pain and sorrow, no war or violence? Fill in every dream a person could possibly have, and it could be like that and more. It is an amazing thought. (Jan)

Thus, it is not only one's own belief that matters in expressing notions of life after death, but the belief of the deceased becomes a source in meaning-making practices as well. Central in this fragment is the notion that the afterworld will be a better place, with no "pain and sorrow, no war or violence". It could be anything in one's dreams. Once again, we can observe that concepts of heaven are ways to express that which remains vague and has a "different shape". Heaven and paradise are not literal places where the dead reside, but metaphors to express the unknown. The following example of Gerrit, a Roman Catholic man in his 80s, also illustrates this:

> I certainly believe in heaven. We only don't know what it will look like. […] [My wife] believed in it too, only she was afraid of it ... I don't know why. I think it is the unknown ... […]. I told the people in the mourning group at the church: "I only get more and more curious about it." "What makes you curious then?" they asked. Well, what life after death will look like. I cannot be bored. I have to be doing things, attempting something. I'm just thinking, what in the name of God are they doing out there? (Gerrit)

We find a strong notion of the afterlife in Gerrit's account, referred to as believing in heaven, but no image of heaven, apart from it being a pleasant idea and a pleasant 'place', as we have also seen in the case of Jan. In Gerrit's narrative, this is further emphasised by the statement that he is curious to find out what life after death will be like. However, at the same time, he explains the difficulty of this:

> Look, I believe in it, but I don't have to think about it. Do you understand? I don't have to think about it, because I cannot handle the concept of eternity. There is no end to it. In many faiths, there is a God-like figure, and we as Catholics learn that He is without beginning and end. The alpha and omega of the Greek alphabet and things like that. I think that is a difficult concept. Things need to have a beginning … but the beginning is not there, because He already existed. Yes, He. But who is He? A being? A concept? Or what? I believe in something universal. Because they asked me too: "Where do you think she is?" I told them, for all I care, she is right next to me. I compare it to the way your thoughts work. In your mind, you can go everywhere, whether you really have been there or not. […] You are not limited. And what being unlimited means, I cannot know. I can only believe in it. I don't feel like I'm separated from her, just that we temporarily have entered different worlds. Well, the other is not a world. World sounds too concrete, but anyway, […] In human terms, I believe that it has to be something beautiful, but I cannot fill it in. Look, imagine I like doing something, for example, playing chess. They probably don't have chessboards. But what do they have? If the soul truly exists, and continues to exist after death, our human needs and thoughts that are part of this life do not fit in with it. But what it will be … I would love to know. (Gerrit)

Again, Gerrit's account shows a high familiarity with religious vocabulary, mentioning the difficulty of the concept of eternity, the alpha and omega, the complexity of the concept of God, the notion of the soul, and the otherness of the afterlife. All of which is used to explain the mystery of death. Interesting in his narrative is the way in which he incorporates his own experiences and preferences. His story about the impossibility of playing chess over there, and the analogy with being unlimited in one's thoughts demonstrate that he is combining various sources to illustrate the unknown nature of the hereafter. Like Jan, who spoke of astronomy and the origins of life on earth, and, as such, is drawing on natural symbols of immortality, he employs non-traditional images to strengthen and re-imagine his Christian notion of the afterlife.

In the accounts of our interviewees, we have so far seen the usage of various sources – the Bible, religious experts, religious teachings, the belief of the deceased, and personal interests – to refer to the complexity of life after death in a Christian sense. Our last interview fragment, from Heleen, a 66-year-old loosely affiliated Catholic woman, again illustrates an emphasis on the mystery of the afterlife. Furthermore, we see that she also draws on the community of her church and the existence of other faith communities to ground her eschatological beliefs:

> When I … not that it makes me believe more or less in life after death, but when I am in church, like yesterday, I think "these people can't all be crazy, there has to be something". Why …? And not just Catholic, but everywhere. I mean, there has to be something […]. His death gets to me, you know … It makes me realise, yes, never again. That I will never see my husband again. Ever ... Yes, perhaps I will meet him when I myself shall die. But in what way? You'll never know. Because you don't have your body anymore. We cannot possibly understand what kind of dimension that is. What kind of form. (Heleen)

We thus find traditional notions that portray life after death as being too mysterious and alien to grasp, but if it has to be described in human terms it will be an utterly different, but beautiful and better, place to look forward to. The notions of heaven, paradise, and soul are used by our interviewees, but not exclusively. Rather, other sources or images are meaningful to the religiously affiliated bereaved in order to express the meaning of life after death *in a Christian sense*. Furthermore, we have seen that traditional images are secondary to descriptions of the afterlife as the great unknown or mystery. Interestingly, the notions of the Kingdom of God, Judgement Day, or bodily resurrection weren't specifically brought up by our interviewees. However, the notion of ambiguity in relation to the body and to the afterlife was profound. Heleen specifically mentions the absence of our bodies as we inhabit them now, as she explains that we cannot know the form of life after death. Combined with our survey results, we can argue that the afterlife image of resurrection has lost its significance as a metaphor regarding personal eschatology. Simultaneously, however, the notion of continuity and discontinuity in relation to the hereafter, which underlies the belief in resurrection, is of the utmost importance to the ecclesial bereaved we interviewed.

3.5 Fading vocabularies of theological symbolic immortality

The fragments of interviewees discussed above show a strong familiarity with Christian meta-narratives, as well as a re-imagining of afterlife beliefs. The given descriptions were framed by the experiences of the bereaved and re-imagined in view of their personal interests and preferences, whereby they drew on religious sources, religious teachings, and biblical literature, as well as the faith community. Notions of life after death are thus not static, but develop throughout one's life, and relate to the particular situations in which the bereaved find themselves. Among the factors that influence the ongoing process of re-imagining is the decreasing role and authority of the church that can be ob-

served in Dutch society. Through transmission of complex religious representations, like heaven, the soul, and resurrection, members of a religious community are endowed with vocabularies to give meaning to death (Whitehouse 2004, Boyer 2001). The decline in church affiliation and (active) church membership has led to a decrease in routinising such images, and therefore has had an impact on the expression and meaning of detailed religious representations. As a result, we can observe 'fading' religious vocabularies.[6] This not only involves a general decrease in traditional symbols of life after death, but it also points to multivocal and altered interpretations of traditional images. The next fragment of dialogue is by a religiously unaffiliated woman who was raised a Catholic, and who still feels close to that tradition in certain respects, in particular to the image of Mary. She shows an awareness of her Catholic upbringing and a disagreement with the notions she retrieved from it:

> My mother believed that she would meet everyone again. Her loved ones, I mean.
>
> [Do you think so too?]
>
> Yes, yes, I think I will see all of them again. Now, I don't know if there ... Perhaps I got that idea from my Catholic upbringing. But I don't believe I will stand at a gate ...
>
> [Something like a heaven?]
>
> No, no, no …
>
> [And neither a hell?]
>
> No, absolutely not.
>
> [So it is not a negative thing?]
>
> No, I associate it with birth. You don't know anything about the event yourself, but it is still a miracle. So death will be something like that too. I think … I hope… […] I remember feeling the baby [of my pregnant daughter-in-law] when we were [in the crematorium]. I felt a grandchild. So someone leaves us and someone joins us. (Marja)

In this fragment, we see a very different verbal vocabulary applied to traditional notions of life after death, compared to the earlier detailed descriptions of death as a mystery. Marja tells us she believes she will see her loved ones again, but this is not expressed in a religious framework. In fact, she no longer identifies

[6] I gratefully borrow the term 'fading vocabularies' from Prof. Dr Peter Nissen, which refers to the weakening of institutionalised forms of meaning-making, on the one hand, and the increased creativity regarding verbal, ritual, and symbolic forms, on the other.

with the traditional notions she was taught in the past, although she uses some of these images in her vocabulary. The existence of a gate, of a heaven or a hell, all are disagreed with. Instead, she draws on her own recent experiences to describe what she thinks might occur after death. As her son became a father two weeks after her mother had passed away, the notion of birth is meaningful to her, creating a sense of continuity in a biological and natural way. To her, birth is a miracle, and perhaps death will be something like that as well. In the same way eschatology is strongly related to protology in theology, the notion that death is related to our origin strongly came to the fore in several interviews. Jan, for example, used the mystery of birth to strengthen his metaphor of the unknown of the afterlife in a Christian sense:

> How does one know for sure there is life after death? We don't ... I found this analogy, and I think it is wonderful. In a mother's womb were two babies. "Do you believe in life after delivery?" one twin asks. "Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later," the other replies. "Nonsense," says the first. "There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?" The second responds, "I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat with our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now." The first replies, "That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded." But the second insists, "I think there is something, and maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore." The first replies, "Nonsense. Moreover, if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life. In the after-delivery, there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere." "Well, I don't know," says the second, "but certainly we will meet Mother, and she will take care of us." The first replies, "Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That's laughable. If Mother exists, then where is she now?" The second says, "She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of her. It is in her that we live. Without her, this world would not and could not exist." Says the first: "Well I don't see her, so it is only logical that she doesn't exist." But then the second twin answers, "Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive her presence, and you can hear her loving voice, calling down from above." (Jan)

In the case of Marja, we encountered the notion that one cannot know what happens after death, particularly when she speaks of death as a 'miracle' like birth, and mentions that she 'thinks' and 'hopes' it will be like birth. The differ-

ence with the earlier accounts, however, lies exactly in the relationship with birth and the absence of an association between this miracle and religious vocabularies. For Cor, Jan, Gerrit, and Heleen, one cannot envision the hereafter, as it will be utterly different and transformed from this world in a Christian sense. Taking Jan's frame of reference into account, the story of the twins indicates this. Marja, on the other hand, does not explain the miracle in a Christian sense, and indeed disagrees with Christian metaphors and notions. Instead, drawing on her own recent experiences, it is the natural symbolism of birth that is meaningful to her, as well as the ongoing cycle of offspring. Thus, she is affirming lived biological and natural images of symbolic immortality, rather than the traditional representations that she was taught in the past.

In addition to disagreement with traditional notions of theological symbolic immortality, notions in the narratives of particular interviewees, we can observe that people have come to understand such traditional notions in polysemic ways. In addition to dissent, we find re-imagined notions of the hereafter, and in several instances it was exactly a reinterpreted notion of life after death that was viewed as traditional and that was subsequently disagreed with. One example can be found in the following account of a Catholic interviewee:

> Whether there is a life after death … I'll have to wait to find out. But the golden plates and spoons from the old days are no longer there. It is what they said in the past, you know. That one would get golden plates and spoons. Well, I don't believe that anymore. I also told the priest. No, said he, we don't believe that. But whether there is an afterlife … I don't know. [My husband] doesn't come back and he doesn't answer me. Sometimes I ask him to give me a sign or something, but no ... Nobody returns from it. […] I would like to see him again, but I know … Perhaps when I'm almost there [dying], I will start believing in it. But now I don't. Now, I really don't believe in it. Where do all these people have to go? (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth's narrative shows an objection towards the traditional images of life after death that she acquired from her upbringing. The golden plates and spoons have lost their symbolic significance to her, but at the same time she is on a quest for meaning. Her mentioning that she told the priest she no longer believed in the golden cutlery evidences that she is looking for a source to re-imagine her afterlife beliefs. This is further strengthened in the fragment when she states that she hopes for, and has asked to receive, a sign from her husband. The more she is searching for words to articulate what she thinks of it, the more doubtful she becomes. In the process of constructing her narrative, she moves

from wondering whether the hereafter might exist to the notion that she "really [doesn't] believe in it".

In the last sentence of her narrative, we see something else that is particularly interesting regarding the fading of religious vocabularies. She "doesn't believe in it" because "where do all [the dead] have to go"? The notion of an afterworld – a place for the dead – strengthens Elizabeth's belief that such a place cannot exist, as it seems impossible to her to fit everyone in. Her religious vocabulary has changed in such a way that images of the afterlife are interpreted literally rather than metaphorically. The afterworld seems to be a psychical place with a certain demarcation of space. As such, we find a tension between literal and metaphorical notions about life after death. And as metaphorical notions are interpreted literally, their possibility and symbolic significance diminishes. To Elizabeth, this concept no longer provides a means to participate in the continuity of life, and has thus lost its meaning in the process of creating symbolic immortality.

Another example of this can be found in the following account by Bettie. Like Elizabeth, she does not believe in an afterworld, in the notion of heaven. However, for her this has nothing to do with spatial impossibility, but rather with the loving qualities of God. If God is real, He would never allow a place like heaven to exist if it meant that everybody ended their lives there:

> I do not believe in heaven because it is impossible. It means you also have to re-encounter the people with whom you did not get along during life. You don't want such a thing. I believe it is like my husband says: that one dwells around somewhere, as a blissful spirit. I don't know … But I also believe that we humans do not live for nothing. And I definitely don't believe in hell, because God is God of love, not of revenge. (Bettie)

Bettie does not disagree with the notion of heaven, but with the specific idea of heaven where one will end up together with all the people who have ever died. It is not our aim to explore whether she has interpreted the notion of heaven correctly or not, but to point towards the fact that she interprets the notion of heaven in a particular way, and disagrees with that specific interpretation. Of interest in her account is that she grounds her ideas in the belief of a loving God. We thus simultaneously find a belief in God, who has an impact on the hereafter, as well as a disagreement with the notion of heaven. This illuminates that traditional afterlife images cannot be interpreted as a uniform set of ideas. Rather, people draw on concepts and sources that have meaning and relevance for them

in their particular context, and that acquire a certain authority based on that context. In the case of Bettie, the beliefs of her husband become the most important source in her thinking about death. She draws on his experiences to create a sense of continuity and to describe what she thinks will happen – one will dwell as "a blissful spirit" somewhere.

In addition to a decrease in traditional afterlife images and disagreement with notions such as heaven, hell, and resurrection, we find increasingly multivocal images of life after death (McDannell & Lang 2001). People interpret traditional notions of theological symbolic immortality in diverse ways. What is referred to by the image of 'heaven', for example, can be a metaphor for an utterly different place where the dead reside, or a psychical demarcated space for the dead. It can be a beautiful place because of reunion, but also an impossible place because God would never allow the bringing together of all people, including the ones you disliked. The fading traditional vocabularies of Dutch bereaved have thus led to increasingly diverse notions of life after death, expressed by different, as well as identical, terms. This not only holds for religious concepts, but also for non-traditional afterlife images, to which we will now turn.

3.6 Emerging notions of symbolic immortality

The expressions of symbolic immortality we have illustrated so far have not only been drawn from religious sources, but are also based on experiences and reimagined notions of religious meta-narratives. In the described cases, people were or had been part of a religious community during their lives. Today, however, it becomes increasingly common for people to have no religious affiliation, neither in the present, nor in the past. Many people who lose someone today are unfamiliar with a religious upbringing, or only participated in religious education until a very young age. As a result, we find a different, often lower, level of religious literacy among the recently bereaved, and a variety of ways to express notions of life after death. Rather than grounding beliefs in religious teachings, personal experiences appear as the primal source for meaning-making in the face of death. As a result, afterlife images emerge that are more implicit and spontaneous, infrequent, and sensory (Whitehouse 2004, 65–75). The value of such images is not derived from their authorisation by a religious community, but arises from practices that generate multivocal and multivalent meanings.

Let us look at Marja again, who expressed an attachment to her Catholic upbringing, but simultaneously felt quite disconnected from it. When we asked questions regarding her mother's beliefs, she clearly stated that her mother was convinced that she would re-encounter her loved ones, and so was Marja herself. Subsequently we asked some other questions about the continuing existence of her mother:

> [Do you feel like [your mother] is still around? That you can get in touch with her, or …?]
>
> No I cannot get in touch with her, but I can talk to her picture.
>
> [But she doesn't hear it?]
>
> I think she does. I think she is still here. Not with her body though. Because how could that be possible? But I think she listens to the things I tell her. (Marja)

In response to the notion of her mother as being present or reachable, Marja first rejects this idea. Mother could not be reached, but she could talk to her picture. The fragment suggests that her mother is still around somewhere, but to Marja, this seems to be a passive presence. She is there, she can talk to her, and her mother can listen, but they can't really catch up. There is a form of continuity of presence, but also a form of discontinuity: there is no body, only an object, and the deceased has acquired different attributes that seem to prohibit genuine interaction. In this example of Marja, the picture of her mother mediates and evokes her mother's presence. Furthermore, we see that Marja's mother is not in a single place. She is reunited with her loved ones, as we have seen above, but also present in the living room. The boundaries between being somewhere else, perhaps a transcendent space, and being in the here and now are blurred. This stands in contrast, but is also similar, to the account of Cor, who spoke to the picture of his wife and wondered whether he or she had wound up the clock, but then clearly stated he "seriously doubted that the dead are around you". Both accounts show an on-going presence of the deceased in the everyday world of the bereaved. In the narrative of Cor, when he starts to rationalise about the afterlife, this extraordinary relationality is contrasted to the 'true' place of the dead, being somewhere else in the presence of God (Day 2012). To Marja, on the other hand, the difference between a sense of her mother's spirit in the home, as well as among loved ones 'somewhere else', is neither rationalised upon nor expressed as troublesome, as her narrative continues to focus on meaning-making practices in the home. For both Marja and Cor, these practices,

which often relate to objects, involve the presence of the dead and are meaningful in their everyday lives. Regardless of being real, they provide a continuum of shared relationships beyond the lifespan of the deceased individual, to which we shall draw further attention in the following chapter.

Another woman who we interviewed, Yvonne, had lost her brother. After fighting a lengthy battle against cancer, he died in his sister's presence with the help of a doctor in the hospital:

> The moment he passed away, there was an extreme sense of serenity, of peace ..., that pure, serene feeling. All pain, panic, despair, sorrow, and miserableness faded away. I have never experienced anything like that before. It was bizarre. And afterwards, I felt all warm. Everything felt good. It was so strange, and truly, you know they always say that there is more between heaven and earth ... I am absolutely convinced there is. Not because I want to hold on to that, not because I want to believe that, I'm just absolutely convinced of it because of that experience. (Yvonne)

In the case of Yvonne, the confidence that there has to be "more between heaven and earth" first and foremost stems from her experience. Although the specific image of something existing "between heaven and earth" emerges not from the moment itself, but from Yvonne's wider social context, evidenced by her saying "you know *they* always say", it is because of the experience itself that the image acquires meaning. As such, the meaning ascribed to the existence of something between heaven and earth does not derive from an external authority, but from practice itself. It becomes meaningful in the situation at hand. Herein, we find a strong similarity with our earlier description of how people intuitively experience a dualism between mind and body when being present at the moment of biological death, or when encountering the dead body. For Yvonne, however, it does not seem to be the dead body itself, but the feeling of serenity, of experiential transcendence, that sparks the notion of something beyond death.

Two last examples illustrate how particular situations can spark specific images of symbolic immortality. Bettie, the Catholic woman we interviewed after her husband had passed away, told a story about how the dead continued to be present in her everyday life. In recounting memories of her late husband she is creating a sense of symbolic immortality and also illustrates how the dead are making lasting contributions to her life, in creative and biological ways:

> My husband and I often said to each other, something like, [the dead] are with us almost every day. Just in our conversation. When I made dinner, I

> would say, I did it the way mum always used to. You know, those kinds of simple things. Or he would say, yes, your father taught you that. And my sister too, for example, I still have the same humour and taste in clothes. […] In a certain way, they stay with you. (Bettie)

When we spoke to Lisa, a woman in her thirties who had lost her mother to early-onset Alzheimer's disease, she told an elaborate story of all the 'coincidences' and 'signs' that she was encountering in her everyday life:

> What I find very special is that … like yesterday for example. It was pouring rain. One of those typical rain showers one gets in the afternoon. I was really doubtful about whether to visit the cemetery or not, but […] I decided to go anyway, and as I was approaching mum's grave, the sun started shining. I told [my husband]: I don't know what it is, but the sun is always shining there [when I visit her grave]. That is really special. […] Somewhere, I have the idea that ... and I am really not a spiritual person. But I have the idea that she is with me. Because of that sun every time. And I also have it with this song. I heard it the first time when [the doctor] called to say that her health had really taken a backwards step. I drove to see her, and the song was playing on the radio. Later I had a few instances in which I started the car, and [the radio DJ] played the song again. First, I just thought it was a coincidence. It is just a popular song, you know. But I've had it so many times now. Yesterday, when I drove back home from the cemetery. Again. This morning. Again. I told my sister-in-law, like is this a coincidence or …? She said it also could be a sign. I said, let's keep it at that. I find it quite bizarre. Also, it isn't in the middle of the song, it is when the song starts. That is strange isn't it? […] And the other day when we cycled to dad, a butterfly came flying next to [my daughter]. And it flew all the way beside us to my dad's house. And then my daughter suddenly said: "Look mum, that butterfly. I think that is grandma." I thought it was so cute. And yes, you don't know. It could just be a coincidence, but I also thought it was strange that the butterfly followed us all the way to my dad's home. Those are things that make you wonder. Perhaps it is a coincidence or perhaps it is a sign. I don't know, and I don't really care, because it gives me a good feeling. A sense of comfort, like mum is gone but she is also still somewhere. (Lisa)

Lisa ascribes her mother's presence to her personal everyday environment. She is struck by the overwhelming number of coincidental events that she notices around her: when she's at the cemetery, cycling to her father, or driving in her car. Her narrative shows that she is unsure about the 'real' presence of her mother somewhere, but to Lisa, whether she really exists or not doesn't matter as she finds comfort in the signs she experiences herself. Thus, she is not con-

vinced of the existence of life after death, but finds meaning in sensing her mother's presence nearby, in the process of creating symbolic immortality itself.

Implicitly in Lisa's account we find the notion that her deceased mother – whether her spirit or soul – continues to have a form of agency, a power to influence Lisa's environment and to demonstrate her presence in various forms. By making the sun shine brightly, by making sure a particular tune is played from its beginning on the radio, and by flying along to her father's house all the way, a sign is given to Lisa which she interprets as most likely coming from her mother. Her account, furthermore, illustrates how situational afterlife images are perceived, as we have also observed with Yvonne. Although the butterfly, for instance, is commonly related to death, it is not simply its symbolic connotation that is of significance to Lisa. Rather, it is the fact that the butterfly flew along beside them as they were cycling to visit their (grand)father. It is the experience related to this particular butterfly that matters, and that subsequently is expressed as an image of natural symbolic immortality. As in the other examples discussed in this section, it is not an external idea that is reflected upon to give meaning to death or to express death's mystery, and neither can we observe that individual experiences are used to strengthen traditional beliefs. Instead, as we have also seen among the ecclesial interviewees, meaning first and foremost emerges from encounters in one's everyday life.

3.7 Disagreement with theological symbolic immortality

Some interviewees not only didn't use traditional images to give words to their notion of an afterlife, but they explicitly disagreed with such traditional ideas. Charles, for example, Lisa's father, gave the following account:

> I don't think there is anything beyond death. I'm very rational. I once read a dissertation about mind and matter. Matter, as in the universe, black holes, and energy fields. Things like that. And from where these things could have originated. […] That is something so peculiar and special. We cannot grasp it … I do have the feeling that we will merge into the bigger picture. That a person is part of matter ... and umm, that there is a temporal piece of consciousness that we lose when we become part of the whole. It is being connected to and being part of the earth. But such a thing cannot be directed. It is too big. No force would be able to control it. And certainly no God figure. (Charles)

Charles' narrative is a good example of the natural mode of symbolic immortality. Like Jan, he had an interest in the origins of the universe, and in his narrative this is one of the sources from which he draws to give meaning to his wife's death and her continued existence after death. Whereas the complexity of the origins of the universe prompted the notion that existence itself is not coincidental in Jan's story, in Charles' account it inspires the notion that there is no God figure who controls it. This illustrates that similar images are used in different ways to give meaning to death. Precisely because this symbol embodies a multiplicity of meanings, as we have earlier seen with the body, it holds meaning for a heterogeneous group of people in today's context of fading and emerging eschatological vocabularies.

The following fragment of the interview with Charles shows how notions about continued existence after death, as well as the question of human origin, influence mortuary practices. It also illustrates how these practices become part of his system of beliefs, wherein symbolic immortality is conceptualised differently compared to the interviewees who experienced a form of presence of the dead:

> [To choose a burial] was a matter of feeling. We found a wonderful place for her, close to the woods. […] I know that her body is there, but beyond that, I never … many people have this notion that the deceased's "spirit is dwelling around", or something along those terms. […] I don't believe that. I rather see it as giving her body back to the earth. And umm, well that happens the way it happens. But I feel that the process does give and does demand some time. It is a natural process. To me, she is connected with the earth and will become part of it. (Charles)

In contrast to his daughter, Charles does not have an explicit notion of Marianne's spirit dwelling somewhere close by. Rather, he uses the eternal cycle of nature as a metaphor through which he transcends the death of his wife. She does not 'exist somewhere', but her existence diminishes as she is absorbed by nature. This, at the same time, involves continuity, as she is absorbed by something that will last forever.

Another interviewee who disagreed with the traditional, abstract notion of continued existence after death was Anna, a woman in her seventies who had just lost her husband:

> I actually think it is some kind of fantasy, because of course it is impossible. You know, after death. I don't believe there is something after death. (Anna)

In our interview, Anna was very clear about her disagreement with 'religious beliefs', her lack of church involvement, and the absence of a religious upbringing. The notion of an otherworldly afterworld, to her, is "some kind of fantasy". At the same time, however, we see an interesting use of symbolic immortality in her account when she later describes her thoughts on the disposal of her husband's ashes, which we also encountered in the earlier chapters:

> I don't want to keep him in an urn with me […]. And my husband was a walker. [So I have decided] to scatter him in the park, close to the woods, so he can keep on walking there. I'm not looking forwards to scattering his ashes. Actually it is an unpleasant idea. But it's just an idea, you know, that he walks there. (Of course it is not real). It means … yes, to get rid of the ashes. […] But he used to love it. Also, a lot of our family members lie there and I always make a story out of it, like: "Go and have a talk with [Edward], perhaps you will find each other." (Anna)

As we have seen with Charles, for Anna, too, nature creates a sense of continuity beyond the lifespan. She uses natural images of symbolic immortality to give meaning to the place and act of scattering the ashes. Moreover, biological immortality beyond death, and the possibility of re-encountering friends and relatives, is meaningful to her and influences her decision-making process surrounding the cremated remains.

The outline of the qualitative descriptions in this chapter, from taught to experience-based notions of life after death, might suggest a clear distinction between the two, or a linear process from one to the other. However, in the accounts of the bereaved such a distinction is seldom apparent. First of all, it must be noted that all interviewees drew on their personal experiences and their own personal context in creating a narrative of symbolic immortality. Traditional theological symbols are interpreted and reinterpreted in the light of a given event or a particular situation (cf. Benore & Park 2004, 9). In some cases, personal experiences were used to strengthen traditional notions of the hereafter. In other cases, experiencing the presence of the dead in the everyday world was contrasted with the 'real' hangout of the deceased or lack thereof. Furthermore, experiences of the presence of the dead in the everyday world occurred in narratives of the bereaved, alongside abstract ideas about the dead in another realm

or place. Thus, we find connected notions of spatial, temporal, and social forms of continued existence, which are re-imagined in view of the situation at hand.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has drawn attention to notions of symbolic immortality in the attitudes and narratives of recently bereaved people with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background. Focusing on lived afterlife beliefs in relation to the fate of the deceased, we identified the importance of the body, as well as the soul, in traditional and non-traditional afterlife images. Although traditional and non-traditional afterlife images are often placed in contrast to one another, we have argued for an exploration of the dynamics of tradition and innovation in order to shed light on the diversity and situationality of contemporary afterlife beliefs, which are understood as symbolic expressions that point to a form of continued existence of the deceased.

On the basis of survey research, it was first examined whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated respondents, who had recently lost a loved one, identified with traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs. Thereby, traditional afterlife beliefs referred to images of theological symbolic immortality that are identified by people as Christian, whereas non-traditional afterlife beliefs referred to the other modes of symbolic immortality that can be interpreted from both Christian as well as non-Christian meta-narratives. The results showed that respondents agreed with non-traditional afterlife beliefs that emphasised the ongoing existence of the deceased in the minds, hearts, and physical world of the bereaved, whereas they disagreed with the notion of resurrection and expressed neutral attitudes towards the idea of a soul and heaven.

Exploring this further through bivariate analyses, the results showed that religious characteristics have an impact on people's notions of life after death. People's self-identification with 'being religious' gave the strongest association with *traditional* afterlife beliefs. We also found higher agreement with these notions among religiously affiliated respondents than among unaffiliated respondents. Protestants identified with the notions of heaven and the soul, whereas Catholics and unaffiliated respondents expressed neutral attitudes. Additionally, Protestants expressed neutral attitudes towards the concept of bodily resurrection, whereas the others disagreed with this notion. All groups, regardless of religious affiliation, identified with *non-traditional* notions of symbolic immortality, wherein the dead live on in the world around us, through offspring, in objects, and in people's memory and hearts.

In addition to religious characteristics, our survey results illuminated relevant associations between symbolic immortality and people's attitudes towards human remains. People who attach higher value to human remains agree more strongly with notions of a non-traditional soul, and with material notions of life after death, that is, the idea that the dead live on in the world around us and through their bodies – resurrected, or perhaps in another form. Contrary to our expectations, we did not find an association between the traditional belief in the soul and the value ascribed to human remains. This suggests a distinction between the notion of a 'soul' in an otherworldly sense, and the presence of the dead in this world.

In the second part of the chapter, we further elaborated upon these results by illustrating how notions of symbolic immortality are re-imagined in narratives of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors. First, attention was drawn to re-imagined notions of theological symbolic immortality. Among the interviewees who were active church members and familiar with Christian meta-narratives, we strongly encountered the idea of 'the mystery of death' in expressions of symbolic immortality. Other images, such as heaven and paradise, were used, but they first and foremost were adapted to express the inexpressible. Rather than being independent realities, they were a means to give words to the fact that one cannot know what happens beyond death, as this is utterly different from this world. Other modes of symbolic immortality, as well as personal interests, were also used to give words to death's mystery in a Christian sense.

Second, we focussed on the fading of religious vocabularies in relation to the dynamic role and meaning of religion in people's everyday lives. Theological images of symbolic immortality develop during one's life, influenced by the social environment and the particular situation at hand. The decreasing role of institutionalised religion has led to a decrease of, as well as to increasingly, polysemic traditional images. Traditional images lost their symbolic capacity when they were no longer being interpreted as true, both in view of people's interpretation of tradition and in view of their personal lives. Also, we found a tension between literal and metaphorical notions about life after death. When metaphorical notions are interpreted in literal ways they lose their meaning in creating a sense of continuity in the process of symbolic immortality, as their possibility and symbolic significance diminishes.

Third, we described non-traditional and emerging afterlife beliefs. In addition to the fading of religious vocabularies, images of symbolic immorality

emerge that are influenced by personal experiences and that are characterised by their multivocality. Because of the multiplicity of meanings that are embedded in a single culturally dominant image, they continue to be recognisable to a heterogeneous group of people. Furthermore, although being culturally framed, we have seen that notions of life after death first and foremost acquire meaning from experiences in the everyday lives of the bereaved. Although these experiences are diverse – varying from the moment of death, the cooking of a particular dish, or noticing coincidental events in one's natural and social environment – they nevertheless create a sense of experiential transcendence, evoking a reordering of images by which people give meaning to the death of a loved one.

Fourth, we discussed the disagreement with traditional notions of life after death. We drew attention to narratives wherein the mode of theological symbolic immortality was explicitly and thoroughly disagreed with. In these cases, people employed other modes of symbolic immortality to create continuity beyond the lifespan of the deceased. As people did disagree with a form of continuing existence when reflecting thereupon, we found such notions most strongly in their narratives about practices, in particular when describing their motives and experiences around human remains – both corporeal and artificial. The psychical reality of death, experienced by sensing the deceased's presence via human remains or objects, evoked a need for symbolic immortality.

The results of this, and the previous, chapter underline the importance of the social dimension of afterlife beliefs. Further exploring people's experiences of the presence of the dead, and the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead, can, therefore, shed light on the diverse notions of a hereafter, as well as on people's meaning-making practices in the face of death. In addition to abstract afterlife beliefs, such as heaven, paradise, and the universe, or instead of such abstract ideas, it might be these relationships that are of ultimate significance to the bereaved. In the next chapter, therefore, we will examine experiences of, and ritual practices surrounding, the presence of the dead, rather than the verbal articulations of afterlife beliefs.

CHAPTER 6

TRANSFORMING BONDS

RITUALISING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

People continue to have bonds with their dead in various tangible ways, and in past and present tenses. They continue to celebrate anniversaries through which the dead grow old and marriages endure. In public and private spaces, the dead are made present and become the topic or partner of conversation. Such ongoing relationships are by no means new, but have long been overshadowed by a modernist, psychological framework. Since the 1990s this has begun to shift. Today, the continuing bonds paradigm has become a dominant way of understanding grief, mourning, and bereavement. Although many have argued for exploring the dynamics of continuing bonds (Howarth 2000; Valentine 2008; Klass 2006), such dynamics remain easily overlooked. At the present time, they are not overshadowed by a modernist approach, but by a focus on continuity. That which we have come to call 'expressions of continuing bonds', however, might not always point to such continuity but, rather, may signify discontinuity and change. This chapter, therefore, aims at drawing attention to the transformations that occur in relationships between the living and the dead; transformations that are ritually marked by the bereaved, and that enable them to negotiate the absence–presence of their deceased. Although a sense of continuity is apparent in bereavement practices, this chapter argues that we should take the dynamics of separation, transition, and integration into account in order to understand the social and material lives of continuing bonds.[1] It does so by answering the following research question: *Are the relationships between the living and the dead ritualised after the funeral ceremony, and if so, in what ways?*

In this chapter the transforming bonds between Dutch bereaved and their deceased will be explored, drawing attention to the ways wherein postmortem relationships change, in a ritual sense, and how such changes affect the social location of the deceased and the bereaved. After describing the key concepts and methods (§2 and §3), first of all we will quantitatively explore the relationship between the concepts of transforming bonds and rites of passage. We have suggested that accumulative ritual practices can be observed in the Dutch

[1] Parts of this chapter will be published in *Mortality* (Mathijssen, forthcoming).

context, and that incorporation practices gradually occur in the private spaces of the bereaved after the funeral ceremony has been conducted. This not only suggests that the bereaved and the deceased are not yet fully (re)integrated into their everyday or new world after the performance of the funeral, but that they also continue to embody liminal qualities, experiencing the ambiguity of being betwixt and between (Turner 1969). Therefore, we will first explore whether and how relationships between the living and the dead relate to the concept of rites of passage (§4).

Second, on the basis of our interviews, we will draw attention to the dynamics of 'transforming bonds' in the everyday lives of the recently bereaved. Thereby, we will study relationships between the living and the dead in the interface of *form*, *practice*, and *space* (Maddrell 2013). Attention will be given to ritualisations surrounding 'objects of the dead' (§5) and 'corporeal objects' (§6), which will further bring about a strong resemblance with the pattern of rites of passage (Van Gennep 1960; Turner 1967). The diverse and dynamic ways in which people handle objects related to their dead will be explored in non-institutionalised spaces, both in and outside the home. For those unfamiliar with the bereaved or the deceased, the significance of such places is often disguised by their everydayness or hidden behind front doors (Miller 2008, 25). This chapter will show that it is particularly in these places that the dead are separated from, as well as integrated into, the present lives of the living, altering post-mortem relationships. Attention will also be given to the collective dimension of highly individualised relationships between the living and the dead (§6). We will conclude with an overview of this chapter (§7).

1 Key concepts: Ritual practice and ritual meaning

1.1 Death ritual and post-mortem relationships

We have argued for death ritual to be understood as a protracted process of accumulative rites that takes the living through various phases of separation, transition, and incorporation, according to the ways the living perceive the condition of the deceased (cf. Suzuki 2000, 18; Van Gennep 1960; Hertz 1907/1960). This understanding of death ritual as an ongoing procedure is not new, but is urgently needed in the context of the Netherlands, where the current dominant focus on funerary practices is not doing justice to the ritual meaning-making practices of the bereaved. After the performance of the ceremony, diverse and prolonged incorporation practices can be observed among the bereaved that al-

ter the condition of the bereaved and the deceased. Although it has been argued, particularly by Van Gennep himself, that these incorporation practices are often "the most extensively elaborated and assigned the greatest importance" (1960, 146), many of them – particularly those in the homes of the bereaved – have been overlooked from a ritual perspective. By drawing attention to the relationship between rites of passage and post-mortem relationships (quantitative), and by illustrating the ways in which the bereaved ritualise their relationships with the deceased (qualitative), this chapter argues that we can further grasp death ritual by taking the period of bereavement, after the funeral ceremony, into account.

1.2 Transforming bonds

Over the last two decades, researchers have increasingly been giving attention to the concept of continuing bonds. Rather than being seen as a maladaptive situation that had to be resolved, bereavement came to be understood as a continuous process of accommodation, whereby people seek a sense of meaning in the face of loss through ongoing relationships with the deceased (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1996; Walter 1996; Howarth 2000; Stroebe 2002; Valentine 2006; Arnarson 2013; see introduction). Although time and again it has been argued that the diversity of continuing bonds demands further exploration, the dynamics and ambiguities of relationships between the living and the dead remain largely overlooked (Klass 2006). By studying the protracted and highly individualised incorporation practices of recently bereaved Dutch people, we will provide a ritual perspective on the dynamics of post-mortem relationships.[2] By combining the concept of continuing bonds with the notion of rites of passage, we will analyse separations, transitions, and integrations of the relationships between the bereaved and their deceased.

To do so, we will first study these concepts quantitatively. Do the bereaved, as we suspect, identify with notions of continuity, as well as discontinuity, in relation to their deceased? And do relationships with the deceased evoke experiences of separation, transition, and integration? After exploring these confirmative questions, attention will be drawn to the actual practices and narratives of the bereaved. Based on our qualitative material, we will look at the transforming bonds between the living and the dead in the interface of form,

[2] Much recent research has been conducted on the accommodation processes of the bereaved in psychology. Although we are not psychologists, we hope to enrich these debates by providing a ritual, rather than psychological, perspective on such accommodation processes.

practice, and space. This interface, drawn from the work of Avril Maddrell, evidences "dynamic negotiations of absence-presence" (2013, 501), and can shed light on the ritualised separations, transitions, and integrations of both the living and the dead in several situations through material objects. Although we will take into account what people make of their practices, we will not explicitly focus on verbally articulated afterlife beliefs. Rather, we will emphasise the performance of social relationships between the living and the dead, as enacted and expressed by the bereaved (Day 2010; 2012). This, we argue, gives a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the ongoing social existence of the dead.

Considering form, two types of objects will be explored that mediate post-mortem relationships. First, we will look at "objects of the dead" (Gibson 2008). These are objects that belong(ed) to the deceased, were made by the deceased, or symbolise the deceased. On the one hand, the variety of such objects seems to be unlimited, while on the other hand, typical things occur. A few common examples are photographs, clothing, furniture, embroidery, jewellery, or objects constructed in and around the home. Also 'favourite things of the deceased' are common, varying from flowers to a particular culinary dish. These objects express a sense of the deceased's identity, and may evoke shared memories and sensory experiences. Some of them, as we will illustrate, come to acquire social lives of their own and can be viewed as an extension of the body of the deceased (Kopytoff 1986). Second, we will look at objects that 'incorporate' the dead – the cremated remains of the deceased in various forms. In chapter 4 we have seen that the ashes can be understood as ambiguous person-objects that are in-between living and dead matter (Kopytoff 1986; Heessels, Poots & Venbrux 2012), giving them extraordinary power to manage one's changing relationship with the deceased. Hence, the negotiations of absence-presence with such 'corporeal objects' will deepen our understanding of the transformative aspects of relationships between the living and the dead.

Regarding practice, we will look at what people do with objects of the dead, as well as with corporeal objects. We are particularly interested in the movement of objects through space, signifying and evoking separation, transition, and integration, and creating meaningful places. Two types of space will be considered: vernacular spaces inside and outside the home. Using the term vernacular (Bowman 2014, 102–103), we aim to emphasise that we study non-institutionalised spaces, which only become meaningful places as they are lived, valued, and experienced by the bereaved. We thus interpret 'place' as meaningful 'space', emerging from the attachments that people ascribe to it (Feld &

Basso 1996; Watts 2010). We bring into focus the everyday spaces that have no institutionalised collective meaning, but become sacred places to the bereaved because of their association with the deceased, whether through memory or current practice.

1.3 Research questions

In terms of transforming bonds and rites of passage, we first aim to answer the following questions through quantitative analysis: Do the bereaved identify with experiences of separation, transition, and incorporation? And do they identify with notions of continuity and discontinuity in relation to their deceased? To what extent do relationships between the living and the dead relate to and evoke experiences of separation, transition, and incorporation? Second, we wish to illustrate whether and how relationships between the living and the dead are ritualised during the period of bereavement. It is through these qualitative illustrations, in particular, that we are able to grasp the dynamic ways in which the bereaved make sense of death. Thereby, we aim to examine whether and how the bereaved spatially transform their relationship with the deceased through objects. First, we will explore how bonds between the living and dead are ritualised at home by drawing attention to the ways in which the dead spatially move around. Second, we will study in what ways the dead are relocated to places outside the home. Third, we aim to explore how such individualised practices relate to the social environment of the bereaved.

2 Methods

This chapter draws on our conducted survey research (n=198), as well as on the qualitative interviews with recently bereaved Dutch (n=15). As we have explained in our introduction, the interviews were held at the homes of the interviewees, as they themselves had preferred. What started out as a strategy to create a comfortable, safe interview setting immediately became fundamental for our understanding of the transforming bonds between the bereaved and their deceased. As we could observe what people did in their homes, the interviews allowed us to not only study the exegetical meaning of ritualised relationships, but to also observe the operational meaning (Turner 1973). During the interviews a place was created that illustrated the absence-presence of the deceased, and objects of the dead became part of the interviews (cf. Valentine 2008). Domestic memorials, items made by the deceased, pictures, ashes, jewellery, and artworks were used to convey the deceased's identity, to convey whom he or

she truly was to the bereaved, and to illustrate the story told. The home itself thus came to evidence how relationships with the deceased had been during life, how they were in the present moment, and how they had been changing.

2.1 Measuring instruments and data analysis

In relation to the survey research, some remarks must be made regarding the measurement instruments and the data analysis. Being interested in the relationship between transforming bonds and rites of passage, we included statements in the questionnaire that defined these concepts. In relation to the concept of transforming bonds, five items were included in the questionnaire based on earlier research (Quartier 2011), expressing the continuity as well as discontinuity of relationships between the living and the dead.

The concept of rites of passage was operationalised on the basis of the characteristics of separation, transition, and integration (Van Gennep 1960), and the experience of liminality in relation to the middle phase of the ritual process (Turner 1967; 1969). In total we formulated eleven items, which were strongly grounded in our qualitative interviews. Five items described the experience of being 'betwixt and between', and six items described the experience of separation or incorporation. The 'betwixt and between' items were combined with the transforming bonds items in one large question, whereas the separation and incorporation items were respectively situated at the beginning and end of the questionnaire, as the survey followed the process of death ritual chronologically (see appendix C)

In terms of the data analysis, we first conducted two factor analyses (appendix F). By doing so, we aimed to explore what dimensions could be distinguished in the concepts of transforming bonds and rites of passage. Furthermore, we wanted to know to what extent people agreed with these dimensions. Subsequently, we conducted bivariate analyses to study what personal and funeral characteristics could be associated with people's attitudes towards transforming bonds and rites of passage. Moreover, we conducted bivariate analyses to explore how the concepts of transforming bonds and rites of passage relate to one another. Thereby, we also included the earlier distinguished (chapters 4 and 5) dimensions of afterlife beliefs and the scales concerning attitudes towards human remains, as we suggest that these can provide a focus for ongoing relationships between the living and the dead.

Lastly, we conducted two regression analyses.[3] Thereby, we aimed to examine whether and how personal characteristics and the dimensions of our concepts – transforming bonds, afterlife beliefs, and human remains – may be regarded as predictors of the experiences of separation, transition, and incorporation among the bereaved. Do liminal qualities, regularly associated with the period of the funeral, also play a role in the period of bereavement, in the sense that they are evoked by notions of the continued existence of the deceased?

3 Exploring the relationship between rites of passage and transforming bonds

Regarding transforming bonds, the factor analysis (appendix F) resulted in two factors: *continuity* (α .79) and *discontinuity* (α .57). The results showed that people identified with both dimensions (Table 6.1). Thus, the bereaved felt that they could let go of the deceased, but they also felt connected to the deceased at the same time. Rather than being a contradiction, this illustrates the ambiguity of absence-presence that is related to the process of death ritual (Maddrell 2013). On the one hand, the deceased has passed away and the bereaved must live on without the deceased. Yet on the other hand, the deceased continues to be part of the lives of the bereaved in a different way.

Regarding rites of passage, the factor analysis (appendix F) resulted in two factors, which we have termed *social-temporal liminality* (α .88) and *transitional liminality* (α .82). With the notion 'social-temporal' we aim to emphasise the experience of being in-between social locations, for instance, neither being a wife nor a widow, as well as the experience of a different structure, wherein social relationships, the structure of daily life, and the experience of time follow a distinct course (Turner 1969). With the notion 'transitional' we aim to emphasise change that is separation and integration. The results show that people identify more strongly with the experience of transition, than with the ambiguous experience of being 'betwixt and between' in a social and temporal sense (Table 6.2).

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[3] There is an important difference between bivariate and regression analyses. Bivariate analyses draw attention to the association between two variables or concepts, but it does not explain the association. Thus, on the basis of bivariate analysis, we can say that Roman Catholic respondents agree more strongly with ongoing relationships, but we cannot hold this to be true *because* they are Roman Catholic. That question can only be answered through regression. Via regression analyses we can examine the effect of being Roman Catholic upon a particular dependent variable, when all other independent variables are held constant. Thereby, the beta (β) can roughly be interpreted in the same way as the Pearson coefficients that we have already encountered. The adjusted R square shows to what extent the variation in the independent variable can be explained by the dependent variables.

TABLE 6.1 DIMENSIONS OF TRANSFORMING BONDS

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION	MEAN (SD)
CONTINUITY	CONTINUING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE DECEASED	4.2 (.81)
DISCONTINUITY	DISCONTINUING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEVERING TIES WITH THE DECEASED	3.8 (.91)

NOTE: N=193

TABLE 6.2 DIMENSIONS OF RITES OF PASSAGE

DIMENSION	DESCRIPTION	MEAN (SD)
SOCIAL-TEMPORAL LIMINALITY	THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING 'BETWIXT AND BETWEEN'; THE AMBIGUITY OF TIMELESSNESS AND CHANGE IN THE LIMINAL PHASE	3.2 (1.02)
TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY	THE EXPERIENCE OF SEPARATION AND (RE)INCORPORATION IN THE PROCESS OF RITES OF PASSAGE	3.6 (.90)

NOTE: N=191

3.1 Bivariate analyses

Now that we have identified the dimensions of transforming bonds and rites of passage, and have seen to what extent people identify with these dimensions, we will further explore the attitudes of our respondents towards transforming bonds and rites of passage on the basis of bivariate analyses. First, we will look at associations between personal and funeral characteristics (social location) and the distinguished dimensions of rites of passage and transforming bonds. Second, we will explore how transforming bonds and rites of passage relate to one another, as well as to afterlife beliefs and attitudes towards the remains of the deceased.

3.1.1 Rites of passage: Social-temporal and transitional liminality

The factor of social-temporal liminality refers to the ambiguity of the liminal or middle phase of the rites of passage. The six significant associations that were found with personal and funeral characteristics allow us to further explore the variation in respondents' attitudes towards social-temporal liminality (Table 6.3).[4] The results show a moderate correlation with education, indicating that weaker attitudes towards social-temporal liminality can be found among people with higher education levels. Also, the moderate association with gender indicates that women are inclined to agree more with social-temporal liminality

[4] In interpreting associations, we pursued the following rule of thumb: 0 to 0.1 very weak; 0.1 to 0.25 weak; 0.25 to 0.35 moderate; 0.35 to 0.45 strong; > 0.45 very strong.

TABLE 6.3 SOCIAL LOCATION OF RITES OF PASSAGE. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL, FUNERAL TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, AND RELATIONSHIP; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) BETWEEN SOCIAL-TEMPORAL AND TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY AND SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	SOCIAL-TEMPORAL LIMINALITY	TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
SEX (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.25**	-.23**
AGE	-.09	.08
EDUCATION	-.29***	-.16*
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.26***	.16*
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.18*	-.14
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.11	-.04
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.13	-.09
RELIGIOSITY	.02	-.03
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.22**	-.21**
TYPE OF BODILY DISPOSAL (CREMATION VS. BURIAL)	.12	.05
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.26**	.46**
TIME SINCE FUNERAL	.03	.06

ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

than men. No significant correlation was found in relation to the time that had passed since the funeral or in relation to the age of our respondents. However, the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased was relevant. Those who had lost their partner experienced a stronger sense of being betwixt and between than those who had lost a parent.

In terms of religiosity and religious affiliation, the moderate and weak associations show that Roman Catholic respondents agree more strongly with the social-temporal dimension of liminality, compared to religiously unaffiliated and Protestant respondents. Protestant respondents identified less with social-temporal liminality than religiously unaffiliated respondents. A similar trend can be observed regarding the type of funeral. Respondents who participated in ecclesial funerals were less inclined to identify with social-temporal liminality. There is no significant correlation with religiosity or the religious affiliation of the deceased.

The results in relation to religious characteristics are somewhat surprising. Earlier research has suggested that religious beliefs and practices can pro-

vide an answer to the instability that is experienced during the liminal phase. By providing a known, traditional framework – both socially and temporally, connecting the deceased and the bereaved to the religious community, as well as to a mythical dimension in time – it has been suggested that the experience of social-temporal liminality is reduced among those who are familiar with the traditional framework (Quartier 2007). To get a better picture of the role of religion in relation to social-temporal liminality, we should take the relationship between religious affiliation and religiosity into account. We would expect that a particular group of respondents, namely those who identify with a stronger sense of religiosity, as well as with a religious community, would agree less with social-temporal liminality. To test this hypothesis, we included two standardised interaction variables in the regression analysis: Catholic * religiosity and Protestant * religiosity.

The factor transitional liminality refers to the transitions (of separation and incorporation) that the bereaved experience in the face of death. Again, we will explore associations with personal and funeral characteristics to further understand the variation in respondents' attitudes (Table 6.3). The results show a very strong association between one's relationship with the deceased and the experience of transition. Respondents who lost their spouse identify more with transitional liminality compared to those who lost their parent. Earlier, we also found a moderate association between the relationship with the deceased and the experience of being 'betwixt and between'. These results are in accordance with our expectations and with earlier literature. The loss of a spouse often implies a more tangible change of status – a larger social gap – in the everyday life of the partner (Stroebe 2002, 134). This is not to say that losing a partner is generally more intense than losing a parent. It only suggests that the loss of a spouse has a larger impact on the organisation of daily life, which is commonly shared to a larger extent between spouses than between parents and their adult children. We will explore this further in our qualitative illustrations. In addition, the analysis shows that men are less inclined to agree with transitional liminality than women, and that people with higher education levels express weaker attitudes towards transitional liminality. No significant correlation emerged in relation to age, the time that had elapsed since the funeral, and the type of disposal. In terms of religious affiliation and religiosity, we only found one weak association. Roman Catholic respondents identify more strongly with the transitional dimension of liminality, compared to religiously unaffiliated and Protestant respondents. People who participated in a non-ecclesial funeral agree

more strongly with the experience of transition than people who were involved with an ecclesial funeral. There is no significant correlation with religiosity and the religious affiliation of the deceased. As mentioned earlier, we will further examine religious characteristics in the regression analyses.

3.1.2 Transforming bonds: Continuity and discontinuity

The factor analysis of transforming bonds resulted in two factors pointing to the continuity and discontinuity of one's bond with the deceased. By drawing attention to the associations with personal and funeral characteristics, we aim to increase our understanding of the ways in which respondents identify with continuity and discontinuity (Table 6.4).

Surprisingly, no significant associations were found in relation to discontinuity. This suggests that people identify with letting go of the deceased regardless of their social location. Some variation was found in relation to continuity. Similar to the associations that we observed in relation to rites of passage, the results show that bonds with the deceased continue to be more tangible among spouses (compared to adult children of the deceased), among women

TABLE 6.4 SOCIAL LOCATION OF TRANSFORMING BONDS. CORRELATIONS (ETA FOR THE NOMINAL VARIABLES OF SEX, DISPOSAL, FUNERAL TYPE, RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, AND RELATIONSHIP; PEARSON'S R FOR OTHER ORDINAL VARIABLES) BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY AND SOME PERSONAL AND FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS.

	CONTINUITY	DISCONTINUITY
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
GENDER (MALE VS. FEMALE)	-.21**	.03
AGE	-.04	-.02
EDUCATION	-.22**	-.10
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHARACTERISTICS		
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION BEREAVED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.28***	-.04
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.18*	-.02
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION DECEASED		
CATHOLIC VS. NON-AFFILIATED	.08	.07
PROTESTANT VS. NON-AFFILIATED	-.12	.04
RELIGIOSITY	.08	-.00
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (ECCLESIAL VS. NON-ECCLESIAL)	-.11	.12
	.03	-.02
TYPE OF BODILY DISPOSAL (CREMATION VS. BURIAL)		
RELATIONSHIP (PARTNER VS. PARENT)	.28***	-.12
TIME SINCE FUNERAL	.00	-.11

NOTE: N=188. ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001(***), P<.01(**) OR P<.05(*).

(compared to men), and among people with lower education levels. No significant associations appeared in relation to age, the type of disposal, and the time that had passed since the ceremony.

In view of religious characteristics, two significant associations became visible. Respondents belonging to the Roman Catholic Church identified more with continuity than respondents belonging to no religious community or to Protestant affiliated respondents. The weak association with Protestant affiliation shows that Protestant respondents agreed less with continuity than did the religiously unaffiliated. This suggests that a starker boundary between life and death is experienced by Protestants than by Catholics, which will be further examined in our regression analyses. There is no significant association with religiosity and the religious affiliation of the deceased, and no relevant difference could be observed between people who participated in ecclesial and non-ecclesial funerals.

3.1.3 Rites of passage and transforming bonds

Attitudes towards the experiences of separation, transition, and incorporation are not only influenced by personal characteristics and features of the funeral in which one has participated. We have seen that the bereaved move through these phases in view of the ways in which they perceive the condition of the deceased (Hertz 1907/1960; Suzuki 2000). Thereby, the bereaved can perceive the condition of the deceased from various angles: temporal, spatial, and social. Does the deceased continue to exist, and if so, where and in what form (Honkasalo, Koski & Kanerva 2015, 5)? Furthermore, the social relationship between the deceased and the bereaved is likely to play a role. To explore whether experiences of separation, transition, and integration continue to influence the lives of the bereaved beyond the performance of the funeral ceremony, we will look at correlations between social-temporal and transitional liminality and the dimensions of transforming bonds, afterlife beliefs, and human remains. Although we focus predominantly on transforming relationships in this chapter, afterlife beliefs and values towards human remains cannot be neglected, as they provide a focus for relationships between the living and the dead (see chapters 4 and 5).

Regarding the two dimensions of transforming bonds, continuity and discontinuity, and the two dimensions of rites of passage, social-temporal and transitional liminality, the results show four significant correlations, whereby those related to continuity are very strong (Table 6.5). People who are more inclined to cherish a relationship with their deceased are more likely to identify

with the experience of being betwixt and between, whereas those who identify with discontinuing the relationship agree less with the experience of social-temporal liminality. Also, the results suggest that people who continue a relationship identify more strongly with the experience of change, whereas those who let go agree less with experiencing a transition. At first glance these results might seem contradictory, as continuing bonds do not seem to parallel transition while discontinuing bonds do. We argue, however, that regardless of people's ability and wish to continue relationships, they inevitably experience transition. Loss creates a tear in the social fabric that cannot be escaped. People must undergo a change. These results suggest that this rupture is more strongly experienced among those who want to stay in touch with the deceased, precisely because they have to let go.

Regarding non-traditional afterlife beliefs, whereby the deceased lives on in the heart and memories of the bereaved (immaterial), as well as in the everyday environment through objects, offspring, and works (material), very strong

TABLE 6.5 CORRELATIONS (PEARSON'S R) BETWEEN DIMENSIONS OF RITES OF PASSAGE, TRANSFORMING BONDS, AFTERLIFE BELIEFS, AND HUMAN REMAINS.

	SOCIAL-TEMPORAL LIMINALITY	TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY	CONTINUITY	DIS-CONTINUITY
CONTINUITY	.63**	.55**	-	-
DISCONTINUITY	-.19**	-.24**	-	-
NONTRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.40**	.49**	.60***	.09
NONTRADITIONAL MATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.43**	.56**	.48***	-.10
TRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.21**	.12	.25**	.08
TRADITIONAL MATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.17*	.16*	.13	-.02
VALUE HUMAN REMAINS	.42**	.36**	.40***	-.12
GRAVE	.54**	.55**	.62***	-.26
CREMATED REMAINS	.45**	.33**	.36***	-.09

NOTE: N=188. ALL CORRELATIONS ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***), P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*)

correlations were found with social-temporal liminality, transitional liminality, and continuity. No significant and relevant results emerged in relation to discontinuity. People who agree more strongly with non-traditional afterlife beliefs express a stronger identification with the experience of being betwixt and between, as well as with the notion of continuity. Through non-traditional afterlife beliefs, the deceased thus seems to remain closely attached to the earthly, everyday world of the bereaved, evoking the liminal quality of not yet having reached a stable position. At the same time, the results show that this attachment also enhances the experience of transition. Thus, whereas afterlife beliefs create a form of continuity, they also confront the bereaved with loss, that is, with the absence of the deceased (Maddrell 2013).

In relation to traditional afterlife beliefs we can observe similar positive correlations, although all of them were less strong and not all of them were significant. A possible explanation for these weaker correlations is the more otherworldly nature of traditional afterlife beliefs, referring to the notion of the soul in heaven as well as the belief in resurrection. The results suggest that concepts that relate less to the everyday practices and situations of the bereaved, in comparison with non-traditional afterlife beliefs, have a smaller impact on people's lived experiences of separation, transition, and incorporation, as well as continuity and discontinuity.

Lastly, we explored the role of the remains of the deceased. In relation to the grave, as well as in relation to the cremated remains, high to very high correlations were found. Through human remains, a material and immaterial relationship can be continued with the deceased. By literally keeping the dead in near proximity, the results suggest that the bereaved and the deceased continue to embody liminal qualities. At the same time, human remains confront the bereaved with inescapable loss and change in their lives. Interesting in this regard is the absence of significant correlations with discontinuity. The fact that the correlations are negative suggests that a connection with the deceased, albeit in a different form, is emphasised, rather than the idea of letting go.

3.2 Regression analyses

Our bivariate analyses have suggested that the liminal experience of being 'betwixt and between', as well as the experience of transition, relate to the transforming bonds between the deceased and the bereaved, and to material and immaterial notions of continued existence. To see whether the experiences of social-temporal liminality and transitional liminality can also be explained by the-

se concepts and characteristics, two linear regressions (method: enter) were conducted (Table 6.6).[5] We have included only those characteristics and dimensions that showed relevant (r=>.25) and significant correlations in the bivariate analyses.[6] Social-temporal liminality and transitional liminality were entered as the dependent variable, the other concepts and characteristics as independent variables. This allows us to explore which personal characteristics, and which attitudes towards transforming bonds, afterlife beliefs, and human remains, may be regarded as predictors for the experience of social-temporal and transitional liminality. By looking at the standardised regression coefficients (β), we will describe the relative weight of the particular variable in the total explained variance. In different words: what is the unique contribution of each variable, when all other variables are held constant?

3.2.1 Social-temporal liminality

For social-temporal liminality, we find a high overall explained variance of 52 percent (Adj. R^2). Thereby, *continuity* has the strongest predictive value (β .42, p<.001). The bereaved have a stronger experience of being betwixt and between when they continue a tangible relationship with their deceased. Liminal qualities thus extend beyond the funeral rites. Furthermore, the results show a negative effect of discontinuing bonds (β -.17, p<.01). The experience of social-temporal liminality weakens when people are able to discontinue their relationship with the deceased.

Second, the results show that one of the interaction variables of religious affiliation and religiosity plays a role. A higher degree of *religiosity among Protestant respondents* predicts a weaker experience of social temporal

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[5] In relation to *social-temporal liminality*, we looked at several assumptions. We conducted an analysis of standardised residues, which showed no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -2.8, Std. Residual Max = 2.0). Multicollinearity was not a problem, as we found no correlations >.80, no VIF values > 2.7 and no tolerance values <.38. Third, the data met the criteria of independent errors (Durbin Watson = 1.91). Fourth, the histogram of standardised residues showed that the errors are normally distributed in the data, and the P-Plot and scatterplot of standardised residues illustrated that our data meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance and linearity. Lastly, we met the assumption of non-zero variance.
In relation to *transitional liminality*, we checked for the same assumptions. The analysis of standardised residues showed no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -2.97, Std. Residual Max = 2.10). Multicollinearity was not a problem, as we found no correlations >.80, no VIF values >2.7 and no tolerance values <.38. Third, the data met the criteria of independent errors (Durbin Watson = 2.03). Fourth, the histogram of standardised residues showed that the errors are normally distributed in the data, and the P-Plot scatterplot of standardised residues illustrated that our data meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance and linearity. Lastly, we met the assumption of non-zero variance.

[6] Cf. Field (2013), 270; to allow for a comparison of the different dimensions of liminality, we also included those characteristics in the analysis that met these demands in only one of the bivariate analyses.

liminality (β -.14, p<.05). This suggests that the ambiguity of being betwixt and between is reduced, as the deceased and the bereaved are more highly engaged with the Protestant community, where people share a familiarity with beliefs and ritual practices. Among the religious bereaved who are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, we do not find a significant result. However, the result does point in the same direction.

Also, the *type of funeral* (ecclesial vs. non-ecclesial) predicts experiences of social-temporal liminality. People who participated in an ecclesial funeral identify less with the experience of social-temporal liminality (β -.16). However, on the basis of our results we cannot give a conclusive explanation. It again might have to do with the more established ritual structure that occurs in ecclesial funerals, through which people have more grip in the face of liminality. Another more convincing explanation could be that people experience a certain amount of resignation because of the faith of the deceased, who was said to be

TABLE 6.6. REGRESSION ANALYSES (METHOD: ENTER) FOR SOCIAL-TEMPORAL LIMINALITY AND TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY WITH WEIGHTS (B) FOR EACH VARIABLE AND TOTAL EXPLAINED VARIANCE (R^2 AND ADJUSTED R^2).

	SOCIAL-TEMPORAL	**TRANSITIONAL**
SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
GENDER	-.06	-.04
EDUCATION	-.08	-.02
SOCIAL-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS		
CATHOLIC VS. RELIGIOUSLY UNAFFILIATED	.01	-.03
PROTESTANT VS. RELIGIOUSLY UNAFFILIATED	-.03	-.04
RELIGIOSITY	-.04	-.02
CATHOLIC * RELIGIOSITY	-.13	-.17**
PROTESTANT * RELIGIOSITY	-.14*	-.18**
FUNERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
TYPE OF FUNERAL (CHURCH – NON-CHURCH)	-.13*	-.11
PARTNER	.10	.30***
CONTINUITY	.42***	.17**
DISCONTINUITY	-.17**	-.19***
NON-TRADITIONAL MATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.09	.25***
NON-TRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS	.01	.15**
TRADITIONAL IMMATERIAL ESCHATOLOGY	.13	.05
REMAINS	.14*	.12*
R^2	.56	.61
ADJ. R^2	.52	.57

NOTE: N=188. STANDARDISED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS (B) ARE SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001 (***) OR P<.01 (**) OR P<.05(*).

$F_{\text{SOCIAL-TEMPORAL}}$ (15,172)= 14.4, P<.001; $F_{\text{TRANSITIONAL}}$ (15,172)= 17.9, P<.001.

religious in 97 percent of the ecclesial funerals in which our respondents participated. Although people themselves might not be familiar with the practices of a particular (religious) tradition, the fact that the deceased was part of such a tradition and wanted the funeral to take place within this tradition may give guidance to the bereaved. Further research is needed to make any hard statements in this regard.

Third, the results show that the value that people ascribe to the *remains* of their deceased is a predictor for people's experience of social-temporal liminality (β .14, p<.05). Attitudes towards the experience of social-temporal liminality increase when people ascribe a higher value to the remains of their loved ones. As we have seen with continuity and discontinuity, this shows that the experience of social-temporal liminality can be evoked after the funeral ceremony by human remains. The duration of the liminal phase extends when people more strongly appreciate the present remains of their deceased.

3.2.2 Transitional liminality

For transitional liminality we also find a high overall explained variance, namely of 57 percent (Adj. R^2). Thereby, the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved has the strongest predictive value. Losing one's partner predicts a stronger experience of transitional liminality, in comparison to losing one's parent (β .30, p<.001). We have suggested that this has to do with the impact of the loss on the everyday social lives of the bereaved (cf. Stroebe and Schut), whereby the transition is more tangibly felt among people who used to share their daily lives with the deceased.[7] The impact of sharing the same space with the deceased is, thus, profound and will be further explored in our qualitative illustrations.

Agreement with non-traditional material (β .25, p. <001) and immaterial (β .15, p<.01) afterlife beliefs also predicts a stronger experience of transitional liminality. The belief in an ongoing existence of the dead in the material and social world of the bereaved confronts people with the transition that has taken place, both regarding people's own social location as well as regarding the irrevocable loss of the deceased. Thus, the belief that the deceased lives on evokes the experience of separation and reincorporation. As we did not find significant results between afterlife beliefs and social-temporal liminality, this

[7] It must be noted that we did not include other relationships, neither did the parent-child relationship include parents who had lost a young child. For a further account of these particular relationships, see the work of Peelen (2012).

suggests that afterlife beliefs grant the deceased a relatively stable new place, rather than a temporal betwixt and between destination.

Third, discontinuity (β -.19, p<.001) and continuity (β .17, p<.01) explain people's experiences of transitional liminality. The bereaved, who continue their bond with the deceased, experience a stronger transition, whereas those that discontinue their relationship with the deceased experience a weaker transition. Rather than being a contradiction, we have argued that people who want to continue the relationship with the deceased have a stronger experience of change, due to the inescapable character of transition. Being able to discontinue the relationship with the deceased, on the other hand, seems to make the experience of transition subtler.

Fourth, we find that both a higher degree of religiosity among Protestants (β -.18, p<.05), as well as a higher degree of religiosity among Roman Catholics, predicts a weaker experience of transitional liminality (β -.17, p<.05). A possible explanation for the weaker identification with transition is the weaker experience of being betwixt and between that we encountered earlier, as social-temporal and transitional liminality are closely related to one another (r=.73, p<.001). Still, the negative value of these results is unforeseen. Religious meta-narratives often refer to an otherworldly place for the dead, creating distance between the world of the living and the world of the dead.[8] Therefore, we expected this group of respondents to experience stronger boundaries between life and death, and, hence, a stronger sense of rupture and transition, compared to those with no religious affiliation and religious self-identification. Our results contradict this line of thought. Rather, they suggest that religiously affiliated people, who also identify as being highly religious, experience a subtler transition to a life without the deceased. Our results show that this is not related to people's faith in life after death, neither to religious affiliation or religiosity in itself. Rather, our results suggest that the form and intensity of engagement with a religious community – its people, traditions, and beliefs – plays a role in bridging the gap that emerges in the face of death.

The final significant regression coefficient is the value of the bodily remains of the deceased. People who value the remains as more important, as special or sacred, and as a means to continue relationships with the deceased, have a stronger experience of transitional liminality (β .12, p.<05). The remains confront people with the physical death of their loved ones and the consequential

[8] In practice, this distinction is absent, but when explicitly asked about it does come to the fore.

changes. Our qualitative research will allow us to look more closely at this relationship.

4 Transforming bonds between the bereaved and the deceased

Our quantitative explorations have shown that people identify with both the continuity and discontinuity of relationships with the dead. Moreover, we have seen that people who continue relationships with the dead experience both the ambiguous qualities of liminality, as well as a strong sense of change and transition. This not only suggests that death ritual – the accumulative rites that enable the bereaved to manage their changing relationship with the deceased – is prolonged after the funeral ceremony, but also points to a constant dialectic between distance and proximity, of letting go and keeping close. It is to these lived dynamics of transforming bonds in the private lives of the bereaved that we now turn. We will first draw attention to practices with objects of the deceased, after which we will move on to examine practices with corporeal objects that incorporate the ashes of the deceased. Lastly, we will focus on the collective dimension of transforming bonds. As such, we will not only illustrate that bonds between the living and the dead are transformative, but also that these bonds change the status and the social location of both the bereaved and the deceased.

4.1 Relocating the dead at home

An implicit sense of the presence of the deceased is commonly felt in the everyday lives of the bereaved, particularly at home. The accounts of the interviewees show specific, concrete, and detailed encounters with their dead through personal objects in particular places. In these material encounters we suggest that the continuity of bonds may be interwoven or oscillate with the discontinuity of bonds (cf. Miller & Parrot 2009). Therefore, this section demonstrates the ways in which practices surrounding furniture, photographs, clothes, and jewellery transform the relationships between, and the social location of, the living and the dead.

4.1.1 Refurbishing the home, refurbishing relationships

Refurbishing the home is a task many bereaved people are confronted with, evoking a sense of transition and incorporation. As our survey results indicated, this is particularly true in those instances where the bereaved used to live together with the deceased, sharing the same space. Nellie, a sixty-two-year-old

Protestant woman, had taken care of her mother, who died at the age of ninety-two, for a long time. During the final years of her life, Nellie's mother had taken up residence in her daughter's home. During that period, they had not only loved doing things together, but Nellie had also taken great care of her mother. After her death, her mother remained present through artworks, furniture, and clothes. Speaking of various changes that she had made in her home, Nellie's narrative illustrates how she is negotiating the relationship with her mother and gradually reclaiming her own space:

> That, for example, is [my mother's] chair, and I couldn't throw it out. So I reupholstered the chair. […] The colour is almost exactly the same as it used to be. It used to be her chair, and now it has become mine. It makes me feel like she's with me a little. […] Actually, I don't want to get rid of anything she made herself. We both loved doing needlework; I really inherited that from her. […] That [pillow] is one of the last things she made. The last one, [a sampler], is in the hall. I've framed it and I will hang it there [above that cabinet] when I have a new piece of furniture. It has become beautiful. […]. So, I will hang it there. I'm constantly thinking about it but, umm. Yes. Getting rid of that little cabinet also gives me a double feeling. I get rid of her, of her cabinet. That's what I think. There will be something in its place that is really hers, but I still think it is difficult. Like I throw a piece of her away. (Interview recently bereaved, Nellie)

Nellie reclaims a sense of control in her own home by separating her mother from certain objects, relocating her throughout the house, and integrating her in other places. By a gradual sequence of separations, she is weakening the overall presence of her mother, while simultaneously investing in a sense of continuity in particular places, involving particular objects (cf. Miller & Parrot 2009, 516). Her mother's chair, which had always been 'her place' in the house, had just been reupholstered at the time of the interview. This refurbishment had transformed it into Nellie's chair. The chair had been taken out of the home, the old fabric removed, and it was returned in a new coat. Before, during, and after this transition it continued to be inseparably connected with her mother, wearing almost the same colour as it had before.

Another example of transition and reincorporation becomes visible regarding the samplers. The house was filled with them and Nellie had slowly started to move them around to find places for them. To make room for her mother's final sampler, the cabinet in the living room would have to go. By making arrangements for this, Nellie not only creates a hierarchy in the value of objects of her deceased mother, but she also starts to mark a transition in their

relationship. It is not just the cabinet she intends to dispose of, but it is also a part of 'her'. Simultaneously, she recreates a place for her own sense of 'self' and for particular aspects of her shared relationship with her mother. The re-framed sampler, currently situated in the hallway symbolising the ambiguity of the situation, will be reintegrated in a new place in the living room.[9] From a non-place in the home, it will cross a threshold to acquire a central place as a memorial object. In order for this place to come into being, however, Nellie has to refurbish the home further, dismissing and relocating other objects that used to belong, or were made by, her mother. This illustrates clearly that a form of presence of the deceased not simply points to continuity, but also stands in a dialectic relationship with discontinuity and is negotiated and shaped through separating and integrating objects in space.

4.1.2 Negotiating relationships with the dead through photographs

Many bereaved have photographs of the deceased in their homes or within reach – on cupboards, home memorials, hanging on walls, on mobile phones, and in albums. Gibson, as well as others, has elaborately studied photos as "enduring objects of remembrance" and photography as a "technology of mourning" (Gibson 2004, 290–296). For our interviewees, photographs also became such enduring objects of remembrance and mourning. They proved to be ways to connect with the deceased in the home, to talk about, or to, the deceased, and to create places for him or her. Being occupied with transforming bonds between the living and the dead, we came to find the positioning and the relocation of photographs particularly interesting. In this regard, two things stood out. First, photographs were separated from certain places and incorporated into new ones to signify and reinforce a change in the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. An illustrative example of this is found in the account of Johan, a fifty-nine-year-old Protestant, who had lost his brother as well as his father:

> First, the picture of my brother and my father had a prominent place [in the living], and then I was sitting there at night thinking "I'm done with the two of you." It was also rational. It was as if [my wife and I] could not move on

[9] This also draws attention to the economy of objects. Nellie negotiates what can stay and what has to go. Some of the objects, namely her mother's artworks, her chair, and two of her jumpers, cannot be disposed of. She evaluates what has to go and what not, based on the inalienable value of objects. This value lies not in the objects themselves, but in their relationship with the deceased and in the way they evoke or symbolise shared experiences.

> whilst they were hanging there so prominently. It was not good for us. So they have now been banned to the kitchen, which makes it less noticeable. We will keep them in our hearts anyway […]. (Interview recently bereaved, Johan)

As the earlier example of Nellie showed as well, the movement of objects of the deceased in the home illustrates the dialectics of continuing and breaking bonds. After the death of his brother and father, Johan had hung the picture in a central place in his home. Subsequently, he removed it from the wall and placed it elsewhere – in a less visible, less significant spot. The movement of the photo parallels a change in his relationships, in which he aims to give his brother and father a less prominent, but not too distant, place.

At first glance, the presence of the photograph of Johan's brother and father, as well as the presence of the samplers and other pieces of needlework in the home of Nellie, suggest a form of continuing bonds between the living and the dead. Merely looking at the presence of these objects, however, disguises their usage in transforming bonds. Practices surrounding these objects mark separations, as well as incorporations, of the deceased in the lives of the bereaved. By literally moving objects of the dead through space, a change in the relationship is evoked and strengthened. We do not aim to state that all people move objects of their deceased. Also, we are not arguing that every moved object signifies a change in relationships. Nellie's example shows that objects have different biographies and different values, increasing and weakening their power to ritualise relationships. The examples do illustrate, however, that objects play a central role in negotiating and shaping relationships with the dead, and that ritualising a transition in such a relationship reinforces that transition (cf. Miller & Parrot 2009). The practices in relation to objects, not the objects themselves, provide a window to increase our understanding of the dialectics between continuity and discontinuity.

The second dynamic that stood out does not relate to the movement of photographs through space, but to their form. Through the extended use of certain technologies, particularly smartphones, photos may not only demonstrate the dynamics of transforming bonds with the dead, but also suggest an increased mobility of, and concern with, various parts of the deceased's identity:

> [I placed most photos on that cabinet] after the funeral. That one, of her with our grandchild, was also [used during the ceremony]. I think it is nice to have those photos. Beautiful. I can sit here and look at her. Or I use my phone […] I have them all on my phone. The other day, when I was visiting

> [friends], we watched photos and talked about memories. Also with people who didn't know her. Also a friend of mine in France, I showed him [pictures] and then you can talk about it. It is special. Those things are now possible [through technology], which is fantastic. (Interview recently bereaved, Charles)

During the process of loss, people are likely to slowly dismiss the objects of their dead until they retain only a few precious ones (Miller & Parrott 2009). As time goes by, these objects may come to represent an ideal identity rather than a specific memory (Goffman 1959). In choosing particular pictures (as well as other objects) to display in the home after a recent loss, the bereaved start to negotiate between the authenticity and idealisation of the post-death identity of their deceased. The bereaved whom we interviewed all had a few photos of their deceased on display, whereby the positional meaning in relation to other photographs was significant (Turner 1973). Sometimes the photos were placed on their own, sometimes together with other deceased loved ones, establishing a symbolic 'society of the dead' (Hertz 1907/1960, 72). Moreover, they were also placed among pictures of the living, expressing kinship with other family members and friends, most notably children and grandchildren, creating a sense of bio-social immortality (Lifton & Olson 1974). Continuing relationships, hence, not only involve the individual bereaved, but also his or her wider social network.

The photos in the home were diverse, but common was a picture of a cherished moment: an image that was loved, the last picture taken together, or a photograph of a holiday. In the case of Charles, a fifty-seven-year-old religiously unaffiliated man, it was a picture of his wife with their grandchild, expressing and fulfilling a part of her social identify that could have developed if circumstances had allowed it, and she had not suffered from Alzheimer's disease. In addition, a few of the bereaved had placed pictures in the home of their deceased near the end of his or her life, or when facing illness. As Bettie, eighty-four, explained: "That was also who he was […]". Such pictures not only evidence a recent loss, but also point to authenticity as an ideal. Moreover, as they capture a particular part of the deceased's 'multiple post-death identities' (Unruh 1983, 341), the photos illustrate that people continue and discontinue bonds with specific parts of the deceased's self, rather than with the person as a whole.

On further consideration of transforming relationships and form, it is revealing to distinguish between the photos that have physical places in the home and photos that have a mobile place on smartphones, the latter being more

temporal and situational in character, as such photos are not continuously present but have to be looked up and scrolled through. Smartphones allow people to not only keep an idealised image of the deceased at hand, which many of the displayed portraits most solemnly do, but also those images of less ideal moments, less ideal parts of the deceased's identity, and less ideal parts of one's own. Although such images are less likely to be put on 'public' display in the home, many of the interviewees had such photos on their mobile phones. In the case of Charles, they included images of his wife's illness, hospitalisations as well as post-mortem portraits. These images were not dismantled, but maintained, at least for the moment. We therefore suggest that mobile phones have increasingly allowed people to express and cherish various parts of their own and the deceased's joined identity, both idealised and not. Because these images can be brought to the fore temporarily – to look at, show to others, and then put away again – they are a means to negotiate the absence-presence of those parts of the deceased's identity that are too private, or perhaps too painful, to put on display in the home. Mobile phones thus allow for relationships between the living and the dead to become more private as well as more public. It is very likely that some of the bereaved at different moments in time will detach themselves from a certain image of the deceased's identity that is enshrined in a particular photograph, moving it from the smartphone to a map on the computer, or perhaps deleting it altogether.

4.1.3 Wearing the dead

In the examples just discussed we have focused on creating a sense of distance between oneself and one's deceased, while keeping him or her within reach at the same time. The encounters with photographs and furniture illustrate the dialectics of continuing and breaking bonds, multiple post-death identities, and the gradual and protracted process in which the relationships between the living and the dead are transformed. By keeping the deceased close at hand the possibility of renewing proximity is maintained. The ways in which people deal with the clothes and jewellery of the deceased further suggest an oscillation of distance and proximity. Through clothes, the bereaved may separate themselves from the deceased by integrating him or her into a new setting, giving clothes away to charity or placing them in a closet, but they may also separate the deceased from a passive setting, such as a closet or coat stand, to recreate physical as well as mental proximity:

> At one point I decided it was time to clean the closet. I could not give his clothes to anyone else. I just couldn't do that. I don't want anyone else to wear him. I would wear his coat. In the beginning I did this a lot. I would wear this and that […]. I did want to throw it away, but when I opened the closet, I could smell him […]. After he died I started to wear his jumper and a pair of trousers and the neighbours said: "When will you take them off?" I only took them off three or four weeks ago. Suddenly it was time. I felt that it had been enough. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne)

This example of Yvonne, a fifty-three-year-old religiously unaffiliated woman, is an illustration of psychical, dynamic bonds with the deceased. There is no vague sense of presence, but a sensorial experience of that presence through sight, touch, and smell. The seeing and smelling of the clothes evokes the presence of her brother, Tim, and wearing the clothes reinforces it. Yvonne's relationship with the clothes parallels an ambiguous relationship with Tim. On the one hand, his presence brings comfort. On the other, it is uncomfortable as she wishes to alter the relationship, but is unable to do so. She is caught betwixt and between her brother's absence-presence, perhaps even haunted by it, until she is "suddenly" able to distance herself from him. Taking his clothes off, then, marks this. Yvonne's brother has by no means left her life altogether, as we will see later in relation to his cremated remains, but part of their relationship has been rebalanced.

Wearing clothes or jewellery can also symbolically bring the dead back to life in a less confrontational way. Heleen, a sixty-seven-year-old Roman Catholic woman, had recently lost her husband. Four years earlier she had lost her sister, and a year after that her mother had also passed away. She negotiated the bonds with her deceased loved ones in various ways. In her home, for example, she had made a domestic memorial that had become a symbol of the shared memories with her husband, and which also came to include her sister and mother. The memorial was provided with a constant place in the home that she, like Nellie, was currently refurbishing.[10] At the time of the interview she had also just given her husband's clothes to charity, but she had kept a few favourite jumpers and had collected together all of her jewellery:

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[10] Here, we also see the importance of the particular relationship with the deceased and the influence of sharing the same everyday space together. After her mother and sister had died, Heleen had not created a domestic memorial. However, in the face of losing her husband, creating a memorial allowed her to centralise and manage the absence and presence of her husband in their home. The loss is made tangible, enabling her to regain control and to make sense of his death.

> If you now think about how I've dressed this morning. This is my engagement bracelet. I thought, [my husband] will then be with us, with our conversation. And this, this is the golden brooch [of my sister]. We all had them made during our sister-day. […] When she was very ill and already in the hospital, I gave her my brooch to wear […]. She wore it every day and she was so proud of it. (After she died we lost it, but I found it again when I was sorting her clothes). Well, and umm, this morning I thought […] she had to be with us as well. And this is the ring I got from my mother. So I live a little … but almost nobody knows. When I go somewhere I take these things along and they are with me. When you think about it rationally, it doesn't make sense of course, but to me it gives comfort and strength. So, I like those kinds of things. (Interview recently bereaved, Heleen)

In particular moments, Heleen creates proximity with her deceased loved ones. By reintegrating them through wearing several pieces of jewellery, the dead are temporarily brought into near proximity with her and with each other. In this way, she is able to control her post-mortem relationships.

Transforming one's bond with the deceased does not always occur spontaneously or implicitly, but may also be a deliberate matter. People's encounters with clothes not only evidence (a desire for) temporal or definitive attachment and/or detachment, but also point to people's own awareness of their changing relationships. This can be a confrontational and grievous experience, affected by personal emotions and social expectations:

> You also have to deal with stuff. Umm … there is a jacket on the coat stand that I cannot throw out yet. I think it is … yes, it implies a detachment from what we had. That is how it feels. Imagine me taking it and throwing it out. It is strange. It is becoming more difficult as well. [...] In a certain way, it feels like a reckoning, like tearing us apart. (Interview recently bereaved, Charles)

This second fragment of Charles' narrative demonstrates the difficulty of negotiating post-death relationships. Due to his wife's illness, the last years with her had involved intensive care and, as he explained in detail during the interview, his mourning process had started before her biological death (Sweeting & Gilhooly 1997; Mulkay & Ernst 1991). His relationship with the jacket in the hall signifies a strong awareness of his bond with his wife. It represents what they had, and by throwing it out, it is as if he is tearing them apart. The notion that he "cannot throw [it] out *yet*" signifies Charles' sense that a form of detachment ought to happen by disposing of her things. The difficulty he is facing not only

exemplifies the agency of her clothes, but also the social expectations in his environment. In the interview Charles explained that after the long period of illness he "wants to look forward. […] to do fun things again. […] My children think I'm moving too fast". Creating distance from the 'stuff' that once belonged to his wife is thus not only a complex matter because of the agency of the stuff itself, but also as a result of norms and values in one's social environment.

All the given examples exemplify different dynamics, emotions as well as performances, during the period of mourning, whereby the relationship with the deceased, the manner of death, and the experience of presence, or lack thereof, influenced the material encounters of the interviewees. Sometimes a (new) place for the deceased was quickly and easily found, while at other times extensive negotiation had taken or was taking place. In relation to clothes, we have seen that some interviewees gave them away, while others had not done so, or had not done so yet, experiencing social and emotional challenges. Moreover, it is interesting that those who had disposed of the clothes had all kept a few items behind as well; items that particularly expressed part of the (joined) identity or memory of the deceased. Nellie had kept two favourite jumpers, as did Heleen. Charles had disposed of some of Emily's clothes but had kept her jacket, and Yvonne had held onto Tim's coat. Choosing particular clothes or pieces of jewellery to stay behind shows a transformation in the value of these objects. Clothes become memorial objects, to which, in some cases, a sense of agency is attributed. Furthermore, they continue to be a means to renegotiate the reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead.

4.2 Ritualising relationships with cremated remains

We have now seen that objects of the dead play a central part in transforming bonds. Through these objects the dead are separated, transformed, and reintegrated into the lives of the living, extending and discontinuing relationships. In some of the examples discussed we found an obscure boundary between persons and things, whereby the object could be regarded as an extension of the deceased's identity, and, in some cases, of his or her body as well. Boundaries between persons and things become particularly vague if we look at corporeal objects, as we have described in chapter 4. The cremated remains relate both to the body as well as to the corpse, but do not resemble either (Prendergast, Hockey & Kellaher 2006). Ashes are in-between living and dead matter, and although this can also be argued for the above discussed objects of the dead,

there is something quite different about cremated remains. Through ritualisations surrounding corporeal objects, the dead are not only symbolically, but also literally, moved. To some of the bereaved the cremated remains are the deceased in a very psychical sense, giving them extraordinary power and agency in negotiating the transforming relationships between the living and the dead.

4.2.1 Relocating animated dead matter in the home

Marja, a fifty-year-old woman who was raised a Roman Catholic, told us about the cremated remains of her mother and during our talk she took a little box out of the cupboard that held some of them. After the cremation the family had decided to divide up her ashes so everyone "would have a piece of her". The rest of their mother's cremated remains, which the family had not anticipated on existing, were scattered near the chapel of the church, which she had loved to visit and which Marja regularly passed when walking her dog. In this way, part of her mother was kept within walking distance. We were invited to open the little box that was taken out of the cupboard and, besides her remains, there were also other objects. She pointed to the wedding ring of her mother and to an ash charm for a Pandora bracelet. Also present was a little bracelet of her granddaughter, who was born a few weeks after the funeral.[11] Marja's relationship with the ash charm illustrates the dynamics of the transforming bond with her deceased mother:

> In the beginning, I started to wear the charm on my bracelet and I never took it off. Then, I made a necklace out of it, so I could wear her [close to my heart]. I thought this was very beautiful: she was always with me. Then, at one point, I thought, when did she pass away? Eight months ago … so I had worn it for seven months. And [during those months I had] always said [to my children], no, our mum will join us everywhere we go. But at one point … it just didn't feel comfortable anymore. […] I had to take her off […] I don't know, I was standing in front of the mirror and I was thinking, what are you doing? Always wearing your mother? I took her off and never wore her again. (Interview recently bereaved, Marja)

As Marja's sense of self develops, so does the joined identity with her mother, which is shown by the ways in which she wears her mother's ashes. First, she expresses a strong sense and appreciation of continuity and a desire for proximi-

[11] Here we can again observe the connection between birth and death, as well as the importance of social relations and kinship (see chapter 5).

ty, illustrated by the movement of the little ash charm from her bracelet to the necklace close to her heart. By changing the form, she relocated her mother to a more intimate place. Marja's mum was implicitly there for months and she had not considered the possibility that this would change. Then, 'all of a sudden', she did not feel comfortable anymore.[12] By taking 'mum' off she marks a separation by which she spatially distances herself from her mother. This ritualisation does not involve just any object, but an object that symbolises her mother socially and is her mother psychically. By distancing herself from the animated dead matter, something also changes in their relationship:

> I felt like mum was with me, but I don't have that anymore now. She still exists. Surely. But she is no longer in my mind 24/7 […] Look, she is standing there. [She points to a photo in the cupboard, next to the little box with ashes]. Every week, I put flowers there, and I tell her, "Well mum, you have new flowers." I don't forget her, but it is okay now. […] I miss her, but I'm at peace with it as well. […] In the future perhaps I will have moments when I want to wear her again, and then I can wear the necklace again. When I really want to be close with her, I have the necklace. That is really something of my mum. Literally, I can wear her ashes. But for now she is standing there, so I have time for myself. (Interview recently bereaved, Marja)

Here, it becomes clear that the relocation of the ashes from the necklace to the little box in the cupboard, resembling the pattern of rites of passage, evidences a form of severing ties. Mum moved from 'here', close to her heart, to 'there', in the cupboard. By moving the ashes, her mother is integrated in a new place 'for now'. She is still there, but in a different form. In several steps Marja ritualises a transition that loosens the active ties with her deceased mother and through which she finds a new place for her mum in the home to reside. The presence of her mother in the cupboard, as well as the placing of flowers and talking to her mother, therefore, could be considered a form of separation and integration, rather than continuation. As we have seen with objects of the dead, the materialisations of both continuity and discontinuity are fundamental in understanding how Marja lives with and negotiates the absence-presence of her mother. Lastly the temporality of this situation is expressed, as Marja is well aware of the possibility to 'put her mum back on' if she wants to be close to her.

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[12] People describe changes often as 'sudden', as something they undergo rather than they can control.

4.2.2 Leaving home

The tension between distance and proximity, between letting go and keeping close, is not only apparent in the homes of the bereaved. Bonds with the dead at home stand in relation to places for the dead outside of the home. Yvonne, who we have already encountered, had lost her brother, Tim, to cancer seven months prior to our interview. After a long period of illness, during which she had cared for him, the pain became unbearable and Tim died on euthanasia. During our visit, Yvonne gave a detailed account of the continuing relationship she was experiencing with her brother. She described the strong presence of her brother in her own home after the funeral, which made her feel both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. For Yvonne all of this was rather challenging, and when she was allowed to retrieve the ashes from the crematorium, as we have seen in chapter 4, she felt herself unable to bring them home: "No, the idea of placing him here, and I would start staring at it […]. No, I didn't want to." Instead, Yvonne chose to negotiate the challenge imposed by Tim's cremated remains by bringing him out of the home:

> I thought: he has to go to Italy. To Lake Garda. […] [In the plane] Tim had his own seat, and I took pictures of him at the airport. He had told me to fly to Bergamo, as it is inexpensive. Even after his death, he's urging us to be careful with money. Very amusing. […] When we arrived at Lake Garda […] we [drove around for a few days to find a place] and we scattered the ashes there at night, on his birthday. […] We placed his urn in a small niche close to a statue of Jesus. Although my brother didn't believe in it, it felt like a good place […] Afterwards, [my friends] found out that some ashes had stayed in the urn, and they knew how I felt about this. They had once asked me whether I wanted a piece of jewellery with his ashes, and I told them: "My brother was whole, complete. Then he was broken by his illness, but they made him complete again. He has to go as a whole." […] So [my friends] drove back to the same place and made sure his remains were scattered completely. […] If you look at the lake [she shows pictures], you can see what a wonderful view he has. He is celebrating his holiday in Italy. Lovely isn't it? I know that he is intensely happy over there; this is what he wanted, so it's good. (Interview recently bereaved, Yvonne)

Going on a holiday, where the journey is as important as the destination, is a fitting metaphor for the ways in which alterations in their relationship are ritually marked. Both Tim and Yvonne's movements resemble a dynamic tripartite pattern. Tim, who had lost a sense of self when being diagnosed with cancer and who had symbolically "died" for Yvonne as the "brother she knew" when his

treatment started, is, through death, going to a new home that will restore his sense of self. Yvonne gives her brother a new place to reside. She ritualises a retrospective fulfilment of his identity by making his lifelong dream come true – that is, celebrating his old days in Italy (Davies 2002, 141). By doing so she simultaneously creates a sense of distance through relocation. By creating presence in a different place, she negotiates the absence-presence in her own everyday life, in her own home.

In the beginning of Yvonne's narrative about the period after the cremation ceremony, we can almost speak of a lack of absence. She found herself in a situation in which Tim was very much present, as if he were alive. Before telling the story of the journey of Tim's ashes, Yvonne explained that Tim was very much present in her home. She could "see him standing in the kitchen, smiling at her, baking pancakes", they had conversations, he made noises in the house, and she wore his clothes – as we have seen earlier.[13] The experience of him already being there, combined with her fear that this would escalate, made her decide not to keep the ashes at home. The cremated remains evoked a too-strong sense of presence. For Yvonne, as in the example of Marja, the distinction between thing and person has become vague and it seems like Tim is still alive in many ways. The seat in the plane, which Tim occupied like any other passenger, profoundly evidences this. So do the pictures she took of him, as well as his influence over which tickets to buy. Both Yvonne and Tim are actively participating in the journey ahead. By taking his ashes from the crematorium and by leaving Dutch soil, things are starting to change. The transitional phase is evidenced by her narrative, in which she starts to speak of "his ashes" rather than "him" when referring directly to the cremated remains.

When Yvonne arrived at Lake Garda with her friends they had to find a "good spot", in relation to Tim's identity, to scatter the remains and after driving around the lake for a few days, they returned to the pier they had first encountered. It had to be a "place with a view" for Tim to spend his this-worldly afterlife. Lake Garda is an everyday place with no particularly significant, institutionalised meaning. By scattering Tim's ashes space becomes place. The de-

[13] A short additional observation must be mentioned in relation to the pancakes. In our interviews, we also found that people were 'not practicing' some things based on their relationship with the deceased. Yvonne had not baked pancakes since her brother had died, and Nellie had not eaten asparagus since her mother's death, as this was her mother's favourite dish. Thus, not practicing something can be a way of keeping the dead within proximity. Eating these particular dishes felt to Yvonne and Nellie as if they were confiscating part of the deceased's identity. The practice would no longer typically belong to the deceased.

ceased himself is thus not only ritually relocated, but by doing so the lake is transformed into a significant, sacred place for the bereaved and a new home for the deceased, whilst merely remaining a holiday destination for many others.

Following the separation from Dutch soil and the transition to Italy, reintegration takes place. Most strikingly this becomes vivid in Yvonne's emphasis on wholeness. Earlier in our interview, she had described her brother as someone who cared about his physical appearance and health, as well as a person who loved to swim. His illness and the operations had destroyed that part of him. Scattering his ashes all together at the same place, in the water, restored part of his 'original' identity. By doing so Yvonne is able to heal her brother, as well as her own experiences in relation to his illness. She no longer talks about *his ashes*, but about *him* "celebrating his holiday". By travelling back to the Netherlands, by herself, and leaving her brother in Italy, Yvonne had to let go while, at the same time, having created a place of continuity. For both of them, a rather stable 'well-defined position' is created, resulting in a temporal balance of absence-presence.

After Yvonne and Tim had undertaken their extensive journey, the notion of temporality may seem inappropriate. The distance that Yvonne created, knowing "that he is intensely happy over there", gave her a sense of peace and comfort. At the same time, however, the present tense she is using to refer to her brother tells us that this new 'well-defined position' is in fact dynamic and subject to negotiation. The ways in which she talks about her brother in many other instances during the interview show that, although she has distanced herself from her brother by giving him his eternal Italian holiday, his presence still remains evident in other places, not least, imprinted in objects in the home.

Both of these cases draw attention to the disguising power of the continuing bonds paradigm, and the value of the interface of form, practices of separation, transformation, and integration, and space. They show that the continued presence of the dead, particularly when it comes very evidently and clearly to the fore, may not refer to continuity of presence, but to a relocation of that presence, a relocation that allows people to live their lives with and without their dead. By materially separating specific parts of the deceased from particular places and by integrating them elsewhere, either close at hand or miles away, the bereaved renegotiate the experienced absence-presence, thereby creating meaningful places for themselves and their deceased.

4.3 Collective dimensions of transforming bonds

So far, we have given a rather individualistic perspective on transforming bonds. Although the performance of relationships between the living and the dead can be understood in terms of personalised rites of passage, particularly as individualised incorporation practices that prolong the process of the death ritual, these practices are not asocial. Although some of our illustrations might have suggested a one-to-one relationship between the deceased and the bereaved, the social environment of the bereaved also plays a role in the outlook and alterations of post-mortem relationships.

Many researchers, for instance, have drawn attention to post-cremation and post-burial ritualisations, such as disposing of the ashes or erecting a grave stone, which often includes a group of dearest and nearest relatives, and evokes a sense of communitas (Heessels 2012; Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2005). We encountered this, for example, in the case of Yvonne, who travelled to Italy with friends. More collective practices are also found in the homes of the bereaved. Johan moved the photos to the kitchen because he *and his wife* felt they could not move on with the dead being so prominently present. It was an act they decided upon together. Charles' daughter Lisa, to give another illustration, had placed a little bench in the kitchen together with her husband, as she used to have a bench in her mother's kitchen when she was young. Thus, together with her husband and in view of their children, she creates a place for her mother by continuing her tradition.

Furthermore, many researchers have shown that the absence-presence of the deceased can be situationally evoked by the gathering of a certain collective (Howarth 2000; Grimes 2000; Valentine 2008; Hallam & Hockey 2001; Hallam, Hockey & Howarth 1999). This clearly came to the fore in our material as well. When Heleen, for example, visited her older sister, memories were stirred up of the things they used to do together with their younger sister, who had passed away years before. In many encounters during our fieldwork, it became clear that the gap of those no longer present was particularly felt when celebrating an event with friends and family – a birthday, Christmas, graduation, birth, or a marriage. However, the notion of collectivity plays a further role as well: the changes that people make in the relationship with their deceased are influenced by the norms and values of the social context, and are made visible towards that social environment.

4.3.1 Making changes visible to others

In terms of changes in post-mortem relationships, our qualitative data show that the bereaved make such changes visible to others in implicit and explicit ways. When Johan moved the picture from the living room to the kitchen in his home, it might also have expressed a change to those visiting the home. One can imagine that people who notice the change will hear the story of Johan, who felt his deceased brother and father were too present and had to "be banned to the kitchen". In the interview with Yvonne, she mentioned that her neighbours had commented on her wearing her brother's jumper all the time. Thus, when Yvonne stopped wearing her brother's jumper, her neighbours received a sign that something had changed. A more explicit example was found in the case of Marja. Taking off the necklace containing her mother's ashes, as we have illustrated, marked a profound change for her. Whereas, on the one hand, this was a very private practice and experience, called into being when looking at herself in the mirror, it was also a way to clarify to her environment that something had changed:

> Three weeks ago I took [my mother] off. I asked [my husband, son, and daughter-in-law]: "Can you see anything different about me?" "What are we supposed to see?" Yes, they of course didn't see it anymore either. I wore the necklace, but … I said: "I took my mum off. It is done."

4.3.2 The norms and values of the social context

Our material further illustrates that other friends, family members, and colleagues influence the relationship that one has with the deceased. The norms and values of other people particularly work upon the changes that the bereaved person makes, or doesn't make, in that relationship. Also, we see that people sometimes do not use objects to mark a transition in view of the social context, although they experience a change in their relationship with the deceased.

Photographs, for example, were sometimes cherished for the benefit of visitors, rather than because of the bereaved's own bond with the deceased. Elizabeth, a Roman Catholic woman who had lost her husband, told us she would like to change the picture of her husband in the living room, and find a smaller one to replace it. She explained she was not fond of the particular picture and already had a beautiful one in her bedroom. She felt it was no longer necessary for the picture in the living room to be given a place. However, her children had given her the picture, suggesting to her that they found it important. In view of their feelings, she felt reluctant to change it.

Another example of the impact of family relationships could be found in the interviews of Charles and Lisa. When Charles described the difficulty of letting go of his wife, it was not only their relationship that played a role in the process, but also the bonds with and within his family. He told us about a few dates that he had had with a widowed woman, but as he and his daughter explained, his three children felt that their father was moving too fast in this regard. Although for Charles the time felt right, his children felt he was not only detaching from their mother, but particularly from them and from who they were as a family. Charles explained that his dates helped him to deal with his loss, as he could talk about grieving for his wife, emotions that the other woman was experiencing too. However, as his children made remarks about it, it also made him aware that he had to think about his children in the way he was dealing with his loss, and about how they could deal with it as a family.

Another important element of the influence of norms and values of other people comes to the fore in the question of 'normal mourning'. As in earlier research (Valentine 2008), we observed the dominance of the breaking bonds framework in expressions of the interviewees in this project. This was most notable in sayings like "You must think I'm weird", "If you think about it rationally, it is not true of course", or "I know it is not real", when referring to ongoing relationships with the dead. Furthermore, other people's opinions about the fact that a change ought to be made were deeply felt. During our fieldwork at the crematorium, for instance, a woman called the office to ask how she should deal with the loss of her husband, who had passed away two months earlier. As a friend had told her it was time to move on, she felt obliged but unable to do so yet. The comments that Yvonne received from her neighbours are another example. Regardless of whether Yvonne wanted to take Tim's jumper off, it became a norm for her to do so through her social environment. By comments like these, which were also made by other friends, she felt she had to let go of her brother. Personalised incorporation practices are thus inevitably linked to negotiations and contestations in the social sphere, and the norms and values of the social environment.

5 Conclusion

By looking at rites of passage and post-mortem relationships, as well as the dialectics of breaking and continuing bonds in the interface of form, practice, and space, this chapter has drawn attention to transforming bonds between the living and the dead in the Netherlands. Relationships between the living and the dead

are neither new for the bereaved nor for the academic study of bereavement. In the Western context, however, a modernist psychological framework came to dominate notions of bereavement during the 20th century, marginalising ongoing relationships with the dead as illusory and advocating a model in which one was to sever ties with the deceased. In response to this discourse another way of looking at bereavement came to the fore across academic disciplines, predominantly since the 1990s. In pursuit of humanising grief, emphasis was laid on continuing bonds as a normal way of dealing with the loss of a loved one. This chapter has illustrated that the notion of continuity has been overemphasised in relation to the paradigm of continuing bonds. Although it has been argued in some detail that continuing bonds are dynamic, the dynamic itself often tends to be overlooked.

By quantitatively exploring the relationship between rites of passage and post-mortem relationships, this chapter has shown that people identify with both the continuity and discontinuity of relationships with their dead. Continuing relationships with the dead strongly evoke the ambiguous qualities of liminality among the bereaved. First, this illuminates that death ritual is prolonged after the funeral ceremony. We can observe an enactment of accumulative rites that enable the bereaved to manage their changing relationship with the deceased, and their liminal status. Second, post-mortem relationships evoke a sense of separation and incorporation, particularly among the bereaved who shared the same space with the deceased in their everyday lives. Therefore, our results point to a constant dialectic of discontinuity and continuity, of distance and proximity, of letting go and keeping close.

Further insight into the dialectics of transforming bonds was given by looking at the ways wherein the bereaved ritualise separation, transition, and integration through objects in vernacular, non-institutionalised spaces. Thereby, it was illustrated that objects play a central role in negotiating relationships with the dead. Objects of the deceased, as well as corporeal objects, have the ability to evoke the presence of the dead in various ways and are used in practices to (re)shape the identity of the deceased. Furthermore, the relocation of objects in space can be a means to bring the dead into near proximity or to create distance from one's deceased. Thus, the deceased are not only incorporated into the everyday lives of the living, but also in faraway places that spatially and socially separate the deceased from the everyday lives of the bereaved. Above all, it was illustrated that solemnly looking at the presence of objects can disguise the dy-

namic of bonds between the living and the dead. The presence of an object may signify loosening ties with the deceased, rather than continuing them.

In many an instance, the material practices of the bereaved – those that are embedded in the process of death ritual – parallel a change in their relationship with the dead. By moving objects in, and through, spaces, and crossing thresholds, parts of the identity of the deceased are gradually separated, transformed, and incorporated in faraway spaces and in the everyday environment of the bereaved, creating meaningful places. Through these practices, bonds are both tightened and loosened, and parts of the identity of the deceased can be idealised and fulfilled retrospectively. By way of ritualising and materialising a transformation in one's relationship with the deceased, a change in one's relationship and one's social location is evoked and reinforced. Furthermore, ritualisations with objects of the dead not only alter the relationships between, and the social locations of, the living and the dead, but also the value of objects themselves. Items of the deceased become memorial objects that are cherished and ascribed agency by the bereaved in view of particular parts of the deceased's post-death identity.

The power to alter a post-mortem relationship not only lies with the bereaved, but is also influenced by the social context. We have seen that the bereaved explicitly and implicitly make the changes in their relationship with the deceased visible to others. Furthermore, the norms, values, and emotions of other people are taken into account when people ritualise continuity or discontinuity with their deceased. The movement of objects, for example, can be prohibited or stimulated in light of the opinions of friends and family members. Furthermore, one's relationship with the deceased is also influenced by what is understood to be 'normal grief' in the social-cultural context wherein one lives. As in earlier research, the impact of the breaking bonds framework came to the fore in expressions of the interviewees in this project. This was most notable in sayings such as "You must think I'm weird", "If you think about it rationally, it is not true of course", or "I know it is not real", when referring to ongoing relationships with the dead.

Last of all, the transforming bonds between the living and the dead have further emphasised the many layers of post-death identities. Bonds between the living and the dead, whether triggered by objects and traces of the deceased or evoked by the bereaved themselves, do not involve a full sense of self, but only a part of that sense of self. Different forms of material culture may invoke more or less idealised images of the deceased, as we have seen with photos on

smartphones. Moreover, while part of the deceased's identity can be made ritually absent, for example, by moving the ashes overseas, other objects imprinted with a sense of the deceased's identity will continue to maintain a place in the lives of the bereaved. In general, or at specific times, they may reopen the relationship with the deceased and they continue to be a means to renegotiate that relationship. Therefore, separations, transitions, and integrations of the deceased in the lives of the bereaved cannot be understood as a linear process with one desirable outcome, but as an on-going process of negotiation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

RITUAL PRACTICES AND SITUATIONAL BELIEFS IN THE FACE OF DEATH

Throughout this study we have been exploring the various ritual repertoires of recently bereaved Dutch people, with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background, and the situational beliefs that can emerge in relation to these enacted repertoires. Following the trajectory of death ritual, attention has been drawn to the dynamics of ritual practice and ritual meaning. Each chapter has focused on a specific phase in the process of death ritual, allowing us – as it were – to accompany the bereaved in their meaning-making process from the funeral preparations, funeral performance, and disposal practices, to the period of bereavement. In relation to the profound impact of three oscillating developments in Dutch society – the changing role of religion, the prominent emphasis on the individual, and the development of modern cremation – we have accentuated two aspects, in particular, of contemporary Dutch death rites. First, we have illustrated that death ritual today can be understood as a prolonged and highly individualised – although not asocial – process of accumulative rites through which the bereaved make sense of death and their changing relationship with the deceased. Whereas the funeral ceremony is often seen as 'the prominent' and 'the last' rite in the Dutch context, we have drawn attention to the importance of the funeral preparations, as well as the non-institutionalised incorporation practices that emerge during the period of bereavement. Second, we have illustrated how the recently bereaved re-invent and re-imagine their ritual practices and beliefs in light of the particular situation at hand, as well as in relation to social and cultural circumstances in the Netherlands.

1 Research questions and outline of conclusion

In this final chapter we will provide an overview of the process of death ritual, and the ritual practices and ritual meanings that we have studied. This will enable us to answer the following research questions:

In response to a death, what situational beliefs emerge in the funerary and bereavement practices of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the Netherlands?

What ritual actions can be observed in the preparation and performance of funerals of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors, and what ritual actors play a role in this process?

What ritual actions are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors during the preparation and performance of the funeral?

What cremation practices are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors during the process of death ritual?

What notions of symbolic immortality can be found in the attitudes and narratives of the recently bereaved?

Are the relationships between the living and the dead ritualised after the funeral ceremony, and if so, in what way?

In the following chapter, we will first answer the sub-questions (§3), which consequently allows us to delve into the main research question (§4). After doing so, we will dwell on further theoretical reflection (§5). Thereby, we will discuss what the study of death ritual can reveal about (the study of) belief, religion, and ritual. To conclude, we will provide some further discussion and perspectives for future research (§6).

1.1 The protracted process of death ritual: Ritual practice and ritual meaning in a changing context

To answer our research questions, we have made use of two key concepts: ritual practice and ritual meaning (see chapter 1). When confronted with the death of a loved one, the living respond by enacting repertoires that consist of various ritual practices, which are inevitably connected with ritual meaning. Through ritual practice, the event of death is made tangible. However, the various actions, gestures, objects, persons, and places not only enable the bereaved to create structure in the precarious situation and transition they face, but also help them to make sense of it. If ritual "works" (McGuire 2008), it enables the bereaved to seek, create, and take meaning in the face of death (Holloway et al. 2013). Within the constant dialectic between their own global meaning-making system and the particular situation at hand (Park 2013), the bereaved manage their changing relationship with the deceased and express and re-imagine their most important social, cultural, and religious values (Metcalf & Huntington 1991).

2 Funeral preparations: Seeking and co-creating meaning through ritual

What ritual actions can be observed in the preparation of funerals of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors, and what ritual actors play a role in this process? What ritual actions are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the preparation of the funeral?

When a loved one passes away, the funeral preparations are set in motion. In the Netherlands the deceased has to be cremated or buried within six working days after biological death, demarcating an 'arrangement week'. As a result of this demarcation in time, a specific period emerges wherein the immediate bereaved leave the structure of everyday life behind (cf. Turner 1969), and immerse themselves in the preparations for the funeral ceremony. These preparations not only occur in relation to the deceased, but also regarding the bereaved themselves, whose quest for a 'good' funeral intertwines with a quest for meaning. Based on our participant observations, we identified three sets of actions that are of particular significance during the arrangement week: the arrangement interview with the funeral director, the preparations regarding the content of the funeral, and the arrangements in view of the body of the deceased.

2.1 The arrangement interview

During the arrangement interview, numerous practical matters must be discussed together with the funeral director: the type of funeral, the form of bodily disposal, the date, time, and location of the ceremony, the ritual experts to be involved, the care that will be given to the body, the viewing arrangements or wake, the type of coffin, flowers, mourning cards, and 'coffee-table', as well as the finances. Occasionally, the possibility of witnessing the cremation after the ceremony, a recent development in the Netherlands, was also mentioned. Although many funeral directors described their role as 'minimal' and 'practical' – as facilitators who monitor the process of making practical funeral arrangements and thereby support the bereaved in the background – the funeral preparations were anything but merely functional. Rather, they were embedded with meaning.

On a more general level, the funeral arrangements were made in accordance with the lifestyles of both the deceased and the bereaved. Whereas it has been argued that we can observe a shift from the fate of the deceased towards the wellbeing of the bereaved (Bot 1998), we found that the wishes and

identity of the deceased were particularly emphasised (cf. Venbrux 2007b). The fate of the deceased, in the present moment as well as in the hereafter, was important to the wellbeing of the bereaved. Thus, for example, a Eucharistic funeral was prepared in line with the wishes and beliefs of the deceased, even though elements of its content, the ritual expert, or the religious institution did not appeal to the bereaved. What was of importance to the deceased becomes meaningful to the bereaved while funeralising.

Regarding specific ritual actions, a process of co-guidance and co-creation emerged between the funeral director and the immediate bereaved, whereby ongoing negotiations took place between the wishes of the deceased and the wishes of those who stayed behind (cf. Holloway et al. 2013; Kelly 2008). This most strongly came to the fore when a variety of options was given to the bereaved. Thus when, for instance, the time and location of the funeral were not self-evident, the wishes, identities, and wellbeing of the deceased and the bereaved became the topic of deliberation. Whereas some gave preference to a particular location, for instance, because the deceased was born and raised in a particular city, others gave preference to the timing, for example, because the bereaved longed for closure, or due to the everyday commitments and residence of other relatives. In light of the situation at hand, a consensus was thus negotiated upon.

Although most choices were deliberated upon among the bereaved themselves, taking the wishes of the deceased into consideration, there was one particular element in which the ritual expert took a presiding role – the involvement of another ritual expert in view of the content of the funeral. Whereas the choice of religious celebrant was strongly related to the church membership of the deceased, whether a non-ecclesial expert would be involved or not was greatly influenced by the funeral director. Moreover, the particular person to be involved was also mainly decided by the director. Thus, when no past or present relationship existed with, for instance, a ritual coach, it was the funeral director who suggested one. Furthermore, when no other celebrant was to be involved, the scope of the role of the funeral director became more profound during the subsequent funeral preparations. This strongly influences the meaning and authenticity of the funeral, as it is not only important what is said, but also by whom it is said (cf. Bailey & Walter 2016).

2.2 Caring for the dead body

In terms of ritual meaning, the care given to the body of the deceased stood out in the arrangement interviews. The deceased is not only subject and object during the preparations and performance of the funeral, but is also present in the form of the corpse during the arrangement week. During or after the arrangement interview, the bereaved choose clothes and accessories for the deceased, and they have a profound role to play regarding the post-mortem appearance. What is more, they are invited to wash and dress the deceased, together with the mortuary technicians, if they wish to do so. By washing and dressing the corpse, its human-like qualities are restored. The corpse is transformed into a body again, acquiring both inanimate and animate qualities, thus obtaining a liminal character. In ascribing 'living' qualities to the dead body, not only the appearance, but also the senses and personal preferences of the deceased were taken into account.

In the care that is given to the body of the deceased, situational notions about the meaning of death could be observed. Taking into consideration the senses and preferences of the deceased suggests that the deceased has a form of awareness within, thereby pointing to a situational form of ongoing existence. Some bereaved, on the contrary, did not request any post-mortem bodily care, and viewed the body as an empty shell or residue. Regardless of the experiences and choices of the bereaved in relation to the (in)animate dead body, a discourse of care and dignity was observed among the professionals. Not caring for the body was, for example, transformed into honouring the deceased and leaving his or her body to rest. Furthermore, when needed, the mortuary technicians assumed their role as experts and decided what was dignified in relation to the dead body in general. Lastly, it is vital to emphasise the situationality of experiences around the animate and inanimate dead body. Whereas people emphasised the inanimate character of the dead body in their narratives of the moment of death, experiencing a separation that they themselves, as well as the deceased, undergo, this inanimate character is subsequently affirmed and contested by ascribing human-like qualities to the dead body during the ambiguous period before the funeral takes place.

2.3 Preparing funeral content

When the location of the funeral is booked, the coffin arranged, and the deceased patiently awaiting the continuation of his final journey, there is not, as yet, a funeral. The content of the ceremony has to be shaped, and, as hinted up-

on already, two approaches to do so were identified among the bereaved with a Roman Catholic, Protestant, or religiously unaffiliated background. First, the bereaved increasingly give shape to the structure and meaning of the funeral themselves, assisted by the funeral director, on demand. Although this suggests a diminishing role of the funeral director, the reality is more complex. The more the bereaved make their own arrangements in terms of content, the more the skills and knowledge of the expert become *the* source to rely on, in addition to their own expertise, enhancing the authority and responsibility of the funeral director. Second, the bereaved can shape the ceremony together with another ritual expert, either from a Christian or other denominational background, or an 'independent' or institutionally loose ritual coach. When another ritual expert becomes involved, a second arrangement interview takes place to prepare the content of the ceremony.

In creating funeral content, the life story of the deceased, as told by the bereaved, comes to the fore as the root of funeralising, regardless of people's religious and non-religious presumptions. The life of the deceased is the central source and theme in funeral preparations, underlying the motives of the bereaved. By seeking stories, anecdotes, speakers, music, and objects, the identity of the deceased is being shaped and transmitted. Our survey results showed that the individual identity of the deceased cannot be separated from the meaning of the deceased to others, in a social sense. Hence, preparations are made for a funeral wherein the deceased and the bereaved become both the topic and the audience of the ceremony.

In terms of religion, we have argued that ecclesial and non-ecclesial celebrants fulfil a similar role in the preparation interviews. Moreover, the interviews follow a similar course, starting from the life of the deceased. However, one main difference was noticeable. In Roman Catholic and Protestant funerals the ritual expert not only has a commitment to the deceased and the bereaved but also to Christian tradition. In terms of this double commitment, ongoing negotiation took place. Although a relatively clear liturgical framework exists, either prescriptive or descriptive, the ritual actions and their meanings are commonly linked to the life of the deceased. Thus, psalms, symbols, and biblical readings are chosen that speak to all those involved. By creating recognisable funeral content in relation to the deceased, the ecclesial funeral becomes meaningful for the heterogeneous group of funeral participants, even when people are not familiar with the structure and meaning of the Christian liturgy.

2.4 Co-creating the funeral: Ritual roles

With the rise of tailor-made funerals, ritual experts have lost their exclusive authority in funeralising. Today, a process of co-creation can be observed, whereby the deceased and the bereaved have acquired a prominent role. The bereaved ultimately decide upon the content and structure of the funeral, informed by the wishes of the deceased and the know-how of the ritual expert. Thus, rather than making decisions in the name of the bereaved, the experts are guiding the bereaved throughout the funeral preparations and the performance. Although the increased involvement of the bereaved suggests a diminishing role of funeral directors and celebrants, the contrary is true in practice. To make ritual work, experts have to be increasingly skilled in terms of ritual criticism and negotiation. Not only do they have to safeguard their double commitment, in the case of religious celebrants, but they must also constantly adjust to the differing levels of expertise among the bereaved.

In the contemporary Dutch funerary landscape, the so-called ritual coaches have made a place for themselves. Their emergence has not only had an influence on the preparation and outlook of funerals, as we have already described, but has, moreover, sparked debates regarding ritual roles within the funeral industry. Although only six percent of the funerals of our respondents were led by a ritual coach, and albeit different attitudes exist among funeral companies regarding ritual coaches, influencing whether they work or not work with them, the emergence of this group is greatly affecting the job description of the funeral director. The boundaries of their role as 'funeral-facilitators' are currently being questioned, in favour of a role that includes more responsibility in view of the funeral content.

3 Funeral performance: Performing symbolic immortality

> What ritual actions can be observed in the performance of funerals of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors, and what ritual actors play a role in this process? What ritual actions are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the performance of the funeral?

The week of funeral preparations cumulates in the performance of the funeral ceremony, wherein the actions through which the bereaved celebrate the life of the deceased, particularly the chosen speeches and passages of music, were considered the most important, together with the actions that allow the bereaved to pay their last respects. Moreover, the presence of, and sense of connectedness

with, other friends and relatives during the funeral was highly valued, granting the bereaved comfort and support, and a sense of shared goals and values (cf. Turner 1969). As in the process of funeralising, the role of the funeral director was often minimalised to chairing the ceremony, welcoming the funeral participants, keeping an eye on the bereaved and on the timing, and conveying gratitude and practical information at the end of the funeral. Depending on the wishes of the bereaved, the experts who were responsible for the performance of other ritual actions, as well as the content of the ceremony, played a more substantial role.

With the aim of performing a recognisable funeral, in accordance with the wishes and identity of oneself and the deceased, personal meaning must be expressed in the funeral according to the bereaved. All the funerals we studied were personalised, following the lifestyle of the deceased. In light of this, the funeral can be ecclesial or non-ecclesial and can be filled with personal and transpersonal meaning, to a greater or lesser extent. Moreover, the expression of personal meaning in the funeral was not a trivial matter, but, rather, was filled with social and symbolic meaning. Thus, in personalised funerals today the life of the deceased is not merely commemorated and celebrated but also transcended, enabling the bereaved to manage their changing relationship with the deceased through the symbolic conquest of death. Therefore, we argued that personalised funerals today function as collective performances of symbolic immortality, allowing people to create meaning that embraces the continuity of life in the disruptive face of death. For the funeral to fulfil this purpose, symbolic immortality is expressed in the structure, as well as the meaning, of ritual actions.

Through religious symbols the deceased is connected to a principle of eternity in the ceremony, and by the gathering of an ecclesial community and by situating the deceased in a tradition over a thousand years old, the temporality of one's individual life is situated in a larger framework. The meaning of the ongoing ecclesial community and tradition, however, is also challenged by the changing role of religion. The less people identify with the religious collective, the weaker its symbolic meaning. However, the notion of a collective comes to the fore in other ways as well. In the light of biological immortality, we have seen that the social relationships of the deceased, and the meaning of the deceased for the ongoing lives of those present, are emphasised. The importance of bio-social continuity is expressed by the gathering of people to pay their last respects, by people performing ritual actions whereby their relationship with the

deceased is signified, and by the content of these actions. Thereby, creative immortality was of significance too, expressing the deceased's contributions of lasting value. In this regard, not only the works of the deceased were of importance, but the funeral itself can create ongoing value in the name of the deceased, for instance, by raising money for charity. In all these modes, objects played a profound role, acquiring symbolic qualities that transcend the individuality and temporality of life. Furthermore, by means of their metonymical association with the deceased, objects embody the ongoing identity of the deceased. Lastly, a sense of continuity beyond the lifespan was evoked by natural symbols, emphasising the ongoing rhythms of nature. In all these collective performances of symbolic immortality the diverse modes intertwine, creating polysemic ritual symbols that bind the heterogeneous group of funeral participants together. Moreover, in terms of situationality and the protracted process of death ritual, the images that are sought and created in the funerary practices continue to influence the trajectory of meaning-making in the everyday lives of the bereaved, having acquired a special power to continue extraordinary relationships with the deceased.

4 Cremation and disposal practices

What cremation practices are of significance to Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors during the process of death ritual?

Experiences of the bereaved in relation to cremation and disposal practices today are less straightforward than often assumed. The ambiguous quality of human ashes, being in-between living and dead matter, evokes ambiguous experiences among the bereaved. Our results have shown that cremation and disposal practices, as well as the presence of cremated remains, do not only provide a means to make sense of death and manage one's changing relationship with the deceased, but they can also present challenges to the bereaved.

4.1 Concluding the ceremony and witnessing the cremation

In recent years, people – both the bereaved as well as professionals – have been re-inventing the concluding part of the cremation ceremony. The majority of people say farewell to their deceased in the auditorium, whereby they walk past the deceased for a final tribute, such as touching the coffin, nodding, saying a few words, or holding still for a moment in front of the deceased. Those who first pay their last respects influence the tributes of others, often being mim-

icked, especially in terms of the time that people take to say goodbye. Moreover, the dearest and nearest bereaved often pay the final tribute last, in a small circle. Depending on the practical possibilities and the architecture of the location, the cremation ceremony can also be concluded by letting the deceased descend into the ground, or ascend up into 'the sky' – to the first floor of the building – watched either by the whole group of funeral participants or by the dearest and nearest bereaved. Although these practices often depend on the logistics of the venue, they are given symbolic meaning in the narratives of the bereaved and funeral professionals.

Such ways of concluding the funeral ceremony have become common practice in the Dutch context, and many of the bereaved that we encountered, as well as the professionals, expressed the need to guide the deceased all the way to the end, that is, to the cremation chamber. Crematoria have enhanced the possibility of witnessing cremations, and fourteen percent of our respondents were present at the incineration of the deceased, a practice that was valued as highly important. At the same time, accounts from our bereaved interviewees indicated that such participation also led to challenges. People do not always know what to expect from the committal, which can pose difficulties in making the 'right' choice, that is, to witness or not to witness the incineration, and for the actual practice of witnessing. Thus, guidance from the funeral directors, the celebrants, and the crematorium employees is indispensable. Although experts emphasised the importance of guiding the bereaved to the best of their abilities, among themselves they disagree about the preferred or correct practice. Discussion exists as to whether witnessing can help or hinder the bereaved in saying goodbye. Actually seeing the flames was viewed by some as a 'good' incineration, providing closure to the bereaved, whereas others argued the contrary and emphasised the distress that can emerge from the practice. Also, the rapid speed of the incinerations was mentioned as something that can pose difficulties for the bereaved.

4.2 Ash retrievals

From one month onwards, after the cremation, the bereaved can retrieve the ashes from the funerary grounds. For both the bereaved and the professionals, it is difficult to anticipate how people will behave on their initial encounter with the cremated remains. Although the bereaved have thought about the ash retrieval beforehand, which naturally occurs due to the compulsory waiting period, the reality of holding and seeing the ashes can evoke unforeseen emotions.

For some, the large quantity of ashes can also come as a surprise, sometimes demanding an adjustment to one's initial disposal plans. Thereby, not only the ambiguous materiality of the ashes played a prominent role, but the post-mortem relationship between the bereaved and the deceased did so as well. When, for instance, a strong presence of the deceased was felt in one's everyday life, it was feared that this would be increased by the retrieval and the presence of the ashes, emphasising the power that lies within cremated remains.

4.3 Forms of ash disposal and cremation motives

Once the ashes have been retrieved, the bereaved must decide on a temporal and/or final destination. Although the ambiguous materiality of the ashes, being a portable (in)animate person-object that shares in the power of the deceased, may pose challenges in this regard, it simultaneously allows the bereaved to manage the very ambiguity that is evoked by the ashes. By granting the ashes a 'final' destination through a form of disposal, their liminal qualities diminish. The quest for a final destination is not only stimulated, as well as opposed, by the materiality of the ashes themselves, but also by the social relationships of the deceased and the bereaved. The dearest and nearest bereaved have to negotiate together on the disposal practices, and the wishes of the deceased, with whom it was often discussed during life, need to be taken into account.

Scattering the remains and creating ash objects were the most common disposal practices among our respondents, and one third of them disposed of the ashes in multiple ways, for instance, scattering part of them and dividing the rest among family members. Moreover, the possibilities surrounding ash disposal were an important motive for choosing cremation. Other reasons for choosing cremation were the absence of grave maintenance and, as with other choices made during the preparation of the funeral ceremony, the wishes of the deceased. Regarding burial, the wishes of the deceased were also the most decisive factor. Other motivations were the existence of a demarcated place and the symbolism of the earth. Moreover, it is interesting to note that choosing a form of bodily disposal (i.e., cremation) out of discomfort with the other option (i.e., burial) was not a dominant motive. Thus, people's decisions were more strongly influenced by positive qualities, symbolism, and the possibilities of the type of disposal chosen, than by the negative qualities of the other option.

4.4 Ambiguous materiality, ambiguous meaning

In relation to all these practices, we explored whether the dearest and nearest bereaved viewed the ashes as important, as something to be set apart as special or sacred, and as something providing a focal point for continuing relationships with their deceased. Regarding cremation, people expressed neutral attitudes towards these qualities. The slightly negative evaluation of cremated remains that was found among the religiously unaffiliated respondents, of whom over eighty percent had been involved in a cremation, was particularly surprising. Further exploration of these attitudes on the basis of bivariate analyses showed that people ascribe a higher value to the cremated remains when they witnessed the cremation and when they chose a form of ash disposal through which the deceased was kept in close proximity. This suggests that these practices evoke a more intimate connection with the material residue of the body. People who scattered the remains ascribed a lower value to the ashes.

Elaborating further, on the basis of qualitative material it was illustrated that low appreciation of cremated remains does not equal meaninglessness. Rather, different qualities of the ashes are emphasised. As human ashes are embedded in material practices and entangled in social relationships (Hallam 2000), they evoke a discourse of care among the bereaved (Valentine 2008). Whereas for some bereaved the dead matter was important as an object that allowed for continued attachment, for others the qualities of freedom and portability were more meaningful. Rather than the matter itself, their means of negotiating distance and proximity and of creating valuable places for the deceased was significant. Moreover, as both the temporal and final destination of human ashes is of importance to people, the cremated remains evoked social and moral obligations among the bereaved. The temporal character of certain destinations prolonged the discourse of care, and allowed for an open-ended process of ritualising, raising the question of when is a final destination truly found.

5 Re-imagining afterlife beliefs

What notions of symbolic immortality can be found in the attitudes and narratives of the recently bereaved?

In light of the changing role of religion, we explored whether the recently bereaved identify with afterlife beliefs, and if so, how they articulate and live such beliefs. Although research has illustrated that traditional concepts of life after death among the Dutch have diminished – that is, notions of life after death that

are linked to Christian meta-narratives – while non-traditional, personalised, and implicit notions of life after death have emerged (Quartier 2007; Wojtkowiak 2011), little attention has been paid to the dynamics of traditional and non-traditional afterlife beliefs, and the ways in which afterlife beliefs are articulated and reshaped on the basis of one's imagination, and in view of the situation at hand.

Zooming in on attitudes towards life after death among the recently bereaved, the quantitative survey data showed that non-traditional afterlife beliefs, whereby the deceased lives on in the minds and hearts, as well as in the physical everyday environment of the living, were popular among the bereaved. Regarding traditional afterlife beliefs, neutral attitudes were found in relation to notions of an afterlife, a soul, or heaven, whereas disagreement was found with the notion of a resurrection and the idea of an afterlife in the (transformed) body. Delving further into these results, we illustrated that religious characteristics, as well as attitudes towards human remains, are strongly associated with people's afterlife beliefs. Traditional beliefs were more highly valued among people who self-identified as being religious. In terms of religious affiliation, Protestants positively identified with the notions of heaven and the soul, whereas Catholics and unaffiliated respondents expressed neutral attitudes. Additionally, Protestants expressed neutral attitudes towards the concept of bodily resurrection, whereas the other two groups disagreed with this notion. Regarding human remains, the results showed that people who attach a higher value to human remains agree more strongly with non-traditional afterlife beliefs. No association was found between the traditional belief in the soul and the value ascribed to human remains, suggesting a distinction between this and otherworldly afterlife beliefs.

Subsequently, we drew attention to verbal articulations of afterlife beliefs in the narratives of the recently bereaved. In relation to traditional afterlife beliefs – the theological mode of symbolic immortality – the notion of 'the mystery of death' was the most profound in the narratives of interviewees who were familiar with Christian meta-narratives. Images like heaven and paradise were, first and foremost, articulated to express the inexpressible. Rather than being independent realities, they were employed as symbols to emphasise human incapability of knowing what happens beyond death. Non-traditional images, taken from other modes of symbolic immortality in relation to one's lived experiences, were also used to give words to death's mystery in a Christian, as well as in a more general, sense.

We further illustrated the lived character of afterlife beliefs, emphasising that they are inevitably shaped by the context in which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences. The decreasing role of institutionalised religion has resulted in the fading of religious vocabularies, a process wherein traditional images of life after death not only become less profound, but also increasingly acquire multiple meanings. Instead of being taken off-the-shelf, traditional (and non-traditional) afterlife beliefs are re-imagined in view of personal experiences. These experiences are diverse – varying from the moment of death to noticing coincidental events in one's natural and social environment – but, nevertheless, create a sense of experiential transcendence, evoking a reordering and reinterpretation of images through which people make sense of life and death in general, and give meaning to the death of their loved one in particular. As afterlife beliefs are re-imagined, their symbolic qualities can be weakened as well as strengthened. On the one hand, tensions can emerge between literal and symbolic interpretations of life after death. When culturally framed images, such as heaven or paradise, are interpreted in an exclusively literal way, they lose their plausibility and their symbolic power to transcend death. On the other hand, afterlife images continue to be meaningful for a heterogeneous group of people precisely because they are re-imagined and carry multiple meanings within.

The recently bereaved also articulated forms of disagreement in relation to life after death. Among some interviewees who were familiar with Christian meta-narratives, we found a distinction between the ongoing presence of the deceased in one's everyday environment, and the ongoing presence of the deceased with God, whereas for others this distinction was irrelevant in light of the mystery of life after death and the omnipresence of God. Narratives were also found in which traditional afterlife beliefs were explicitly and thoroughly disagreed with, described as impossible, not true, or a fantasy. However, this did not mean that people did not articulate other forms of symbolic immortality. Biological and social lineages, creativity, natural symbols, and objects all played a profound role in the narratives of all our interviewees. Moreover, experiences of continued existence and ongoing relationships were particularly profound in people's exegetical narratives of practices, particularly in relation to the artificial and corporeal remains of their deceased. In addition to abstract afterlife beliefs, such as heaven, paradise, and the universe, or instead of such abstract ideas, it might be these relationships that are of ultimate significance to the bereaved in making sense of death.

6 Transforming bonds

Are the relationships between the living and the dead ritualised after the funeral ceremony, and if so, in what way?

Although it has been widely illustrated that people continue to cultivate bonds with their deceased, the dynamics of such bonds remain largely overlooked. Starting from a ritual perspective, we have drawn attention to the transforming bonds between the living and the dead. Our survey data pointed to a constant dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, and illustrated that people experience both the ambiguous qualities of being 'betwixt and between', as well as a strong sense of change and transition, when managing their relationships with the deceased (Turner 1969). By enacting personalised and accumulative incorporation practices with material objects in vernacular spaces after the funeral ceremony, the bereaved not only transform their relationship with the deceased, but also transform their own social status, as well as that of the deceased.

Further insight into the dialectics of transforming bonds was given by illustrating how the bereaved ritualise the separations, transitions, and integrations of themselves, as well as of their deceased, through objects in vernacular, non-institutionalised spaces. Objects of the dead and corporeal objects play a central role in transforming relationships with the deceased. They evoke the presence of the dead and can be used to (re)shape the (shared) identity of the deceased and the bereaved. What is more, we have illustrated that the material practices of the bereaved parallel changes in the post-mortem relationship. As objects cross a threshold in space, acquiring a new place in a faraway environment, or in the everyday lives of the bereaved, a change in social status can be reinforced. By moving objects in and through spaces, parts of the identity of the deceased are separated, transformed, and integrated into other spaces, creating meaningful places and granting the deceased a different place in the life of the bereaved. Through such practices, bonds can both be tightened and loosened, and parts of the identity of the deceased can be idealised or fulfilled retrospectively (cf. Davies 2002, 141).

Ritualisations with objects of the dead not only alter the relationships between, and the psychical and social locations of, the living and the dead, but also the value of objects themselves. A hierarchy emerges wherein certain objects come to idealise parts of the identity of the deceased, and acquire the status of memorial objects. Above all, it has been illustrated that solemnly looking at the presence of objects disguises the dynamics of post-mortem relationships.

The presence of an object in a particular space may signify loosening ties with the deceased, rather than continuing them. Moreover, while part of the deceased's identity may be made ritually absent, for example, by moving the ashes overseas, other objects imprinted with a sense of the deceased's identity will continue to hold a place in the lives of the bereaved. In general, or at specific times, they may reopen the relationship with the deceased and continue to be a means of renegotiating the relationship. Therefore, separations, transformations, and integrations of the deceased in the lives of the bereaved cannot be understood as a linear process with one desirable outcome, but are an on-going process of negotiation.

The power to alter a post-mortem relationship not only lies with the individual bereaved, but is also influenced by the social context. Drawing attention to the collective dimensions of transforming bonds, we have seen that the bereaved make the changes in their relationship with the deceased visible to others. Furthermore, the norms, values, and emotions of other people are taken into account when people ritualise continuity or discontinuity with the deceased. The movement of objects, for example, can be prohibited or stimulated based on the views of other friends and family members. Furthermore, one's relationship with the deceased is influenced by what is understood to be 'normal grief' in the social-cultural context wherein one lives. As in earlier research, the impact of the breaking bonds framework as a norm came to the fore in expressions of the interviewees in this study.

7 Trajectories of situational beliefs

> In response to a death, what situational beliefs emerge in the funerary and bereavement practices of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated survivors in the Netherlands?

Throughout this study, attention has been drawn to the situational beliefs that emerge in funerary and bereavement practices of the recently bereaved. In the accumulative rites that occur in the process of death ritual (Suzuki 2000, 18), the bereaved are taken through various phases of separation, transition, and integration (Van Gennep 1908/1960), according to the ways in which they perceive the condition of the deceased (Hertz 1907/1960). Thereby, the deceased – both the material body as well as the immaterial components – undergoes a similar movement. In view of this process, we have illustrated that people's situational beliefs are affected by, and give shape to, ritual practices. Moreover, situational beliefs occur in interaction with practices and the (perceived) conditions

of the deceased and the bereaved. By looking at the role of the corpse, the ashes, and objects of the dead, we have emphasised that material 'objects' evoke the presence, as well as the absence, of the deceased and, moreover, allow the bereaved to transform their relationship with, and the condition of, the deceased, as well as their own status.

Our exploration of the trajectories of situational beliefs among recently bereaved Dutch people in the process of death ritual has been strongly influenced by Robert Hertz's classic essay (1907/1960), wherein the condition of the corpse is described as a metaphor for the deceased's immaterial components and the period of mourning among the living. In this respect, attention is drawn to, what we would call today, the situationality of beliefs. Hertz shows that beliefs regarding the immaterial fate of the deceased relate to the condition of the corpse – which also evokes a need for ritual practice – and influence, and are influenced by, the relationships between the living and the dead. Drawing attention to embodiment (Davies 2000, 97–98), Hertz thereby pointed to the fundamental role of materiality in the precarious transition that both the deceased and the bereaved undergo.

In light of the situation today, we have shown that situational beliefs regarding the ongoing presence of the deceased are not only embodied in social relationships and in the corpse, but also – under the influence of shifting circumstances and the possibility of cremation in Dutch society – in the ashes, as well as in objects of the dead. These objects include both the personal belongings of the deceased (cf. Venbrux 2007a; cf. Gibson 2008; cf. Hallam & Hockey 2001), as well as objects that are metaphorically or metonymically associated with him or her. What is more, the multiple immaterial components of the deceased are not only materialised in objects, which then become symbolic vehicles (Turner 1973; Metcalf & Huntington 1991, 36) after the disposal of the corpse, but also when the corpse is still present and, in fact, when the deceased is still biologically alive. In response to encounters with the corpse, the ashes, and objects of the dead, images of symbolic immortality (Lifton & Olson 1974) are constructed and a relationship with the deceased is evoked. In turn, these situational beliefs further shape practices surrounding the corpse, the ashes, and objects of the dead, as well as post-mortem relationships.

7.1 The corpse

The moment the deceased exhales his or her last breath, the bereaved experience the loss of life while the inanimate corpse remains. We have illustrated

that the bereaved initially describe the corpse as empty or soulless. When death occurs, it is felt that "nothing remains". However, as something does remain, namely the corpse – as well as objects of the dead and a relationship with the deceased – this notion of absence is subsequently challenged. In the period before the funeral takes place, we have seen that the corpse acquires a liminal character, whereby it is taken care of in a human-like way – by the bereaved and/or by the professionals.

The corpse becomes a vehicle to express notions of symbolic immortality, as well as a focal point for social relationships with the deceased. In terms of symbolic immortality, the ability to transcend the limits of self and death particularly comes to the fore. By dressing the dead, the identity of the deceased is emphasised and shaped by the bereaved, and in some cases animate qualities are ascribed to the corpse, taking the senses and preferences of the deceased into account. In caring for the deceased, and by placing objects in the coffin or near the body of the deceased, the continuity of biological and biosocial relationships is expressed. Also, in deciding upon the future bodily disposal of the corpse, natural symbols of immortality emerge.

In terms of relationships between the living and the dead, the corpse becomes a vehicle to express and shape continuity, as well as discontinuity. On the one hand, the bereaved turn to the corpse as if it is alive. In addition to taking preferences and senses into account, the corpse is visited, directly spoken to, or non-verbally interacted with. At the same time, a sense of change is experienced in relation to the corpse. By its presence, the corpse emphasises a sense of discontinuity, which comes to the fore in the altered interactions with the deceased. Thus, the corpse is not only treated as animate, but also as inanimate. Lastly, we have seen that some people do not attach practices and beliefs to the corpse, but rather view and treat the corpse as a residue, thereby emphasising the belief that biological death is the end. As these beliefs are situationally related to the corpse, other beliefs can occur in the further trajectory of death ritual, which can be similar to, but also contradict, the beliefs expressed in relation to the corpse.

7.2 The ashes

As in relation to the corpse, the ashes too evoke an ambiguity of being animate and inanimate, and induce beliefs regarding the presence and absence of the deceased. In relation to the animate attributes of the corpse, as well as the ashes, situational beliefs were particularly observed in the practices of people, and in

narratives about their practices. We found narratives wherein people stated that the ashes were, literally, the deceased, but in explicit articulations regarding the nature of the ashes, they were commonly described as dead matter. Thus, situational beliefs in relation to the corpse, as well as the ashes, were enacted rather than articulated.

Most influential in relation to situational beliefs is the fluid and portable materiality of the ashes. Regardless of whether people verbally describe the ashes as animate or not, they are treated as animate and they evoke the presence of the deceased. Through the ashes, the deceased is felt to be in close proximity, while at the same time they are used to create distance between the bereaved and the deceased, and to grant the deceased another place 'to dwell' in this world. By 'to dwell', we do not mean to say that the deceased is flying around like a ghost, but rather that an immaterial component of the deceased is incorporated in a particular place via the material ashes. As long as the ashes are present, they can induce the presence and absence of the deceased. Moreover, the bereaved can continue to reshape their relationship with the deceased through them.

The ashes themselves can, thus, be seen as an object of symbolic immortality. Moreover, they are used to express the continuity of the deceased in bio-social relationships, as well as in nature. By scattering the ashes, for instance, at the grave of another deceased or at the location where other deceased loved ones have been scattered, a biological or bio-social link is established, creating a place where the dead are 'living' together. What is more, by incorporating the deceased in a particular place, it is often felt that the deceased becomes part of a larger system, not only social, but also natural. By scattering the deceased in the woods, for instance, the deceased becomes one with the ongoing processes of nature, joining together with the earth, and even contributing to the fertility of nature. Although we have focused on cremation, similar beliefs occur in relation to burial.

7.3 Objects of the dead

Lastly, situational beliefs emerge in relation to objects of the dead throughout the process of death ritual, that is, in the preparations, the performance, and the aftermath of the funeral. The deceased is kept in close proximity through objects that are metaphorically or metonymically associated with him or her, and the identity of the deceased, including its continuity, is expressed through objects. Objects are thus vehicles of symbolic immortality, used to express the on-

going value of the deceased and his or her works, as well as the relationships among the dead and relationships between the living and the dead. Moreover, objects allow the bereaved to shape and alter the post-mortem identity of, and relationships with, the deceased, emphasising certain objects or qualities of the deceased over others. Over the course of time, people discard objects and end up keeping only a few precious ones (cf. Miller & Parrott 2009; Goffman 1959/1971), allowing them to shape a particular post-mortem identity. Thereby, certain objects acquire extraordinary power, based on their association with the idealised post-mortem identity of the deceased, or on their role during the funerary preparations and performance. Objects, thus, not only evoke situational beliefs, but also allow the bereaved to create and shape them.

8 Theoretical reflection: Belief, religion, and ritual

Studying situational beliefs in relation to ritual practices, in light of social and cultural changes in the Netherlands, invites us to reflect further upon the concepts of belief, religion, and ritual. What does the study of death reveal about belief, religion, and ritual, and what pathways for future research does it illuminate?

8.1 The relational and ordering qualities of situational beliefs

By studying death ritual in relation to the changing role of religion, this study has illustrated that beliefs are situational and, hence, cannot be separated from practices in specific contexts. Beliefs not only shape, and are the result of, practices, but also emerge in the acting process itself, where materiality plays a profound and inextricable role. Beliefs, thus, cannot solely be understood as being prescribed or as a conscious assent to (prescribed) propositions (Carlisle & Simon 2012, 223; Day 2010, 10), and neither as being "a state of mind that produces practices" (Lopez 1998, 43). This is not to say that people's minds don't shape beliefs, as they do, but rather that beliefs are not only related to the mind. They, too, are a matter of bodies, senses, relationships, and (ritual) practices, and are inherently dynamic. Rather than lasting a lifetime, we have emphasised that beliefs change in different contexts on the basis of one's "understanding, imagination, memory, desire, and fear" (Orsi 2011, 15), where they relate to a pragmatic logic, namely, that beliefs "work" (McGuire 2008).

The fact that beliefs are fluid and pragmatic also means that they are full of inconsistencies. One of Stringer's main arguments in relation to the situational and contradictory character of beliefs, is that for most people "the idea of

a coherent system of beliefs held by each individual is meaningless" (Stringer 2008, 51). As our study has underlined, it is indeed pointless – from a lived perspective – to think of beliefs as being a coherent system that is held by each individual. However, we argue that the vainness of this line of thought does not derive from the idea that beliefs are not systematic, nor from the fact that they are not coherent – which we argue, they are – but from the notion that such a system of belief is static. Our study has illustrated ongoing negotiations between people's lived experiences and religious and cultural prescriptions, norms, and values, which both shape beliefs, and reflections on beliefs, in particular contexts. Although situational beliefs may seem inconsistent to the outsider, for people themselves they are only perceived as such when situated in relation to contradictory prescribed beliefs or meta-narratives. Furthermore, we suggest that the systematic and coherent qualities of beliefs are vital to understand their situationally. By enacting and living beliefs, a coherent system emerges that allows people to make sense of life and death, and that provides a means to engage with and (re)shape their world. We thus suggest that beliefs work exactly because of their organising principle.

A last fundamental point that our study has emphasised is that situational beliefs cannot be detached from relationships, that is, relationships with other people and the relationships that people have with their worlds (cf. Venbrux 2007b; cf. Carlisle & Simon 2012, 223). In relation to death, we have suggested that particular relationships – those with the dead – largely take over from abstract and otherworldly notions of continued existence. This raises the question whether post-mortem relationships and verbal and non-verbal expressions of symbolic immortality relate to belief. Is it belief that we are talking about? Much research suggests that post-mortem relationships are first and foremost about relationality (Klass, Silverman & Nickman 1996; Walter 1996; Howarth 2000; Arnarson 2003; Valentine 2008). As we have seen, it is exactly this "extraordinary relationality" (Day 2012) that allows people to symbolically express a form of continuing existence beyond death. Rather than suggesting that these expressions and articulation are not a matter of belief, we wish to underline the importance of emphasising the historicity of the concept of belief as it has developed in the study of religion.

8.2 Death ritual as a pathway to the study of lived religion

Our exploration of situational beliefs invites us to reflect upon the ways in which people are living and understanding 'religion', and simultaneously

evokes the question of how the concept of 'religion' is approached and interpreted by scholars. Raising the question of how people are living religion is inherently related to the question of how the concept of religion is approached in academia. The question itself stems from an increasingly profound critique towards 'mentalistic' approaches to religion that continue to inform much research and understandings of religion today, both inside and outside academia (Meyer 2014, 208; McGuire 2008; Ammerman 2007).[1] From a mentalistic perspective, the core of religion is seen as a private and even invisible matter of the interior self, whereas the materiality of religion is deemed secondary. However, as this study has demonstrated by looking at ritual and material practices, the outward aspects are not merely an addition to religion but part of it (Meyer et al. 2010, 209). It is through practices, inherently involving materiality, that people make sense of life, death, and their world by shaping and "rendering the invisible visible" (Orsi 2005, 73–74).

Underlining the importance of practice and materiality in religion, the question of what is understood to be religion is left open. Rather than providing a conclusive answer, our study invites us to reflect upon the concept of religion from a different viewpoint. Taking death ritual as a case, we have seen that beliefs, practices, and relationships are entangled, and, furthermore, have illustrated that the deceased and the bereaved often take precedence over God in dealings with death. This was particularly true among the religiously unaffiliated bereaved who did not identify with being religious, but also among those with a religious affiliation and self-identification. As people's dealings with death draw attention to their most important social, cultural, and religious values (Metcalf & Huntington 1991), these two elements ponder an exciting rethinking of the concept of religion. Can we think of religion in a way that does not necessarily centralise 'God', nor solely look at private inward notions?

Searching for ways to explore religion from this perspective today, it is valuable to look at the study of religion in the 19th and 20th centuries. When anthropologists, theologians, and missionaries began to study and describe the cultures and religions of a variety of other peoples, Christianity and "religious Christians" were often taken as a reference point (Klassen 2013). Thereby, the

[1] The bereaved and the professionals who we encountered in this study strongly related the concept of religion to religious affiliation, as well as religious belief as being an interior matter. Practices with objects that expressed something beyond death were not identified as being religious. This not only prompts the question of what religion is, but also of how to address and make sense of particular forms of thought and practice that people themselves do not describe as "religious" (cf. Lambek 2013, 4).

inward expressions of religion were prioritised over the outward expressions, which were seen as "intellectually and morally beneath" (Meyer 2014, 208). During the course of the 20th century, these Christian and colonial conceptions of what religion is (and what it is not) began to be questioned (Klassen 2013), and in recent decades, many have advocated to address and deconstruct the (predominantly Protestant) biases in the study of religion (Asad 1993; Meyer 2011; Orsi 2011; Chidester 2014). Moving back to the ways in which people are living religion in the Netherlands today, or in many other Western contexts for that matter, we propose a similar move should be made. Rather than looking at inward expressions, our study invites us to approach religion from a material and anthropocentric starting point, in which the act of transcending is centralised, rather than the 'invisible' attributes of the transcendent itself. From the practices wherein people shape the presence of their dead beyond death (cf. Lifton & Olson 1974), we are invited to look at ways in which people shape the presence of something beyond, at different levels.

8.3 Enacting personalised rites of passage between public and private spaces

This study has drawn attention to death ritual as a protracted and personalised process. Although the idea that ritual does not consist of a single rite has been studied at length (Hertz 1907; Van Gennep 1908; Turner 1969; Grimes 2000; Suzuki 2008), we argue that this notion should be revisited and further explored in the study of death ritual in particular, and ritual in general. In the case of death, the dominant focus on the funeral ceremony as the most important and the last rite, and the rise of cremation as the preferred form of bodily disposal, as well as the decreasing role of (religious) institutions in terms of authority and belonging, call for further study on the re-invented and re-imagined accumulative rites that are enacted in the 'private' spaces of people's everyday lives, which often remain hidden behind front doors (cf. Miller 2008). Most importantly, we have illustrated that these spaces are not merely the backstage where people create and reflect upon ritual in order to create the performance frontstage (Goffmann 1959/1971; Grimes 2014). Rather, these spaces constitute a frontstage area of ritual enactment itself, in which people are bringing about an effect. In the case of death, it is these spaces in particular wherein people are managing their dynamic relationships with the deceased.

Advocating to study the private spaces in which people enact ritual raises questions regarding the notion of 'private space' and the relationship between

rites in these spaces and other rites that take place during the process of ritual. Our study suggests that ritual enactments in private spaces can only be studied in the light of the larger ritual context. The seemingly everyday practices that we have studied in people's homes – such as refurbishing the living space, moving photographs, or throwing away clothes – acquire a particular meaning because they are situated in the process of death ritual. Thus, refurbishing the home does not work as ritual per se, but only in the context of the accumulative rites that enable people to manage their changing relationship with the deceased. From this perspective, we suggest that these practices can be understood as being part of ritualising. Although many of the practices in people's homes are not normally viewed as ritual (Grimes 1990, 8), we argue they cannot be viewed as ritualisations as they are extending and cultivating a ritual process that is already present.

In focusing on private spaces as the frontstage of ritual enactment, we wish to draw attention to the dynamics of the public and the private. This study has illustrated that regardless of whether ritual is prepared among an intimate group of family members, whether it is performed in front of a large audience, or whether it is used to negotiate a relationship with one's deceased, the notion of relationality or "interaction" plays a fundamental role (cf. Grimes 2014, 243). This implies that, per definition, both ritual and space are not fully 'private', inviting us to explore in future research the boundaries between the public and the private in the accumulative rites that occur behind front doors. Are these ritual practices performed or enacted? And if they are performed, in front of whom? Is there a physical or an 'as if' audience (Grimes 2014)? Above all, we are invited to explore what forms of space are deemed most private, and through what practices and devices spaces can be made private or public, to a greater or lesser extent.

In questions of the private and the public, the role of cyberspace especially presents itself as a fruitful area for future research. Regarding relationships between the living and the dead, we have seen that smartphones allow the bereaved to create more private and public spaces, as well as mobile spaces, which can be brought to the fore in particular circumstances. In these practices, the virtual world becomes a "lived reality through manifestations and actions of people in everyday life" (Post 2015, 22). As the boundaries between the virtual and real world are vague and permeable, the virtual world is a powerful domain for the bereaved to manage the absence-presence that they experience in their daily life, as well as to negotiate the authentic and idealised post-death identities

of their deceased. Through digital photographs and social media applications, in particular, certain parts of the identity of the deceased can be idealised, to a greater or lesser extent, and can be made invisible or visible to others, for instance, to those visiting the home. Thus, cyberspace as a ritual environment presents itself as a field of study from which to increase our understanding of ritual negotiations beyond, and in, the ritual performance (Hüsken & Neubert 2011, 1).

9 Discussion and perspectives for further research

In addition to the pathways for future research given in the theoretical reflection section, we wish to highlight some further perspectives regarding the limits of this study, and in light of contemporary discussions in the field of death studies. First, we wish to draw attention to an area for future research that is specifically related to the Dutch context. In our study of funerary and bereavement practices, we have particularly emphasised the dynamics that occur in the ritual preparations and performances of recently bereaved people from a Roman Catholic, Protestant, and religiously unaffiliated background, as well as in people's meaning-making processes. A more in-depth comparison that focuses on similarities and differences between groups regarding a particular ritual phase or element would be a fruitful direction for future research (cf. Cook & Walter 2005). In terms of comparing groups, our study has emphasised that attention should not merely be given to the intensity of religious affiliation and people's self-identification with religiosity, but also to the meaning of religious engagement.

Moreover, the development of Protestant death rites in the Netherlands has not received just attention. In this study, we have presented a modest starting point in this area by illustrating that the democratic nature of Protestant churches increases scope for negotiation in death ritual, which was further enhanced by the creation of the new liturgical format (*Redactie Dienstboek* 2004). However, differences between the mortuary practices of the diverse denominations of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands demand further study. Although there has been a process of reunification, we have seen that the specific denominational traditions continue to be an important source in ritual practice. Further study can illuminate the development of lived mortuary practices in the 20th century among members of Protestant churches. The increased prominence of ritual acts that resulted from the development of the new liturgical format would be a particularly fascinating topic to explore, not only from the point of view of the lived practices and lifestyles of the bereaved, but also in terms of

liturgical developments and systematic theology. Moreover, the mortuary practices of the more orthodox Protestant churches have remained unstudied so far. These practices not only demand attention in their own right, but can also provide insight into the development of death ritual within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, our study has facilitated cross-cultural comparative research, specifically in relation to the recent development of witnessing the incineration of the deceased. We have illustrated that the bereaved expressed a need to guide their deceased all the way to the end, to the incineration, and in some cases, it was felt that the current situation, whereby the bereaved pay their last respects to the deceased in the auditorium, prohibited people from saying goodbye in a 'good' way. The witnessing practices themselves, and the attitudes of professionals towards this practice, demand further study, and could be illuminated through a (cross-cultural) comparative crematorium ethnography. Thereby, the need to guide the deceased all the way to the end, in relation to the architecture of the auditorium and the concluding part of the ceremony, deserves attention. What, for instance, is the impact of 'closing the curtains', as we see in England, compared to 'walking away from the deceased', as seen in the Netherlands? In relation to cremation, the dynamics of the one-month waiting period in relation to construction, performance, and perception of death ritual also demands further comparative exploration.

Lastly, the concept of transforming bonds presents itself as a fruitful area for future research. We have not only illustrated that the relationships between the living and the dead are transformative, which, for instance, becomes visible in, and is reinforced by, the movement of objects through space, but that changes in the post-mortem relationship also alter the social location of the bereaved, as well as their deceased. As we have only studied such relationships during the first year after death, a longitudinal study is needed to further increase our understanding of the temporal dynamics of transforming bonds in relation to the process of mourning. Therein, attention should not only be given to religious and cultural diversity, and the diversity of relationships and social roles, such as being a bereaved partner, child, or parent, but also to complex relationships. Two elements stand out in this regard. First, we suggest that the role of materiality in dealing with 'complicated grief' can be a revealing one. Second, attention should be given to problematic relationships and unfinished business. What happens when people are unable to find a balance in their relationship with the deceased because of unfinished business? What happens when

this prohibits ritual transformation? And in what ways can unfinished business be finalised post-mortem? This provides a fruitful starting point for combining ritual perspectives on transforming bonds with recent psychological studies that focus on processes of adjustment to enrich our understanding of dealing with loss.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – OBSERVATION GUIDE

During our (participant) observations a guide was used as a general framework, each time emphasising particular aspects in view of the situation and the research questions at hand. The observation guide is based on the elements of ritual as described by Grimes (2003, 515-528) and the study of Venhorst (2013) on Muslims ritualising death in the Netherlands. During our fieldwork, it was refined it in view of the particular observation as well as the previous observations.

COMPONENT	NOTES
ACTIONS	WHAT ACTIONS OCCUR?
ACTORS	WHO IS ACTING? WHO IS WITNESSING? WHAT SOCIAL DYNAMICS CAN BE OBSERVED? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE BODY?
MEANING	WHAT EXPRESSIONS AND ACTS RELATE TO MEANING-SEEKING, MEANING-CREATING, AND MEANING-TAKING?
SOURCES	WHAT SOURCES ARE USED?
SCRIPTS, TEXTS & SCENARIOS	WHAT SCRIPTS ARE FOLLOWED?
PURPOSE & FUNCTIONS	WHAT PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS ARE EXPRESSED?
CRITICISM & INTERPRETATION	WHAT CRITICISM IS EXPRESSED? DOES THE PERFORMANCE OF RITUAL BECOME A TYPE OF CRITICISM? HOW ARE ACTIONS INTERPRETED BY ACTORS?
TIME-SPACE ORIENTATION	HOW ARE TIME AND SPACE FRAMED IN RITUAL? TO WHAT TIMES AND SPACES DOES RITUAL APPEAL?
OBJECTS	WHAT OBJECTS ARE USED AND WHAT IS THEIR ROLE?
LANGUAGE	WHAT LANGUAGE IS USED?
INSTITUTIONAL & SOCIAL CONTEXT	HOW DO THE PRACTICES RELATE TO THE LARGER INSTITUTIONAL OR SOCIAL CONTEXT?

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW GUIDES

During our qualitative interviews with ritual experts and recently bereaved people, we made use of interview guides (Heldens & Reysoo 2005). Each interview was prepared by looking at the research questions, the interviewees, the earlier interviews, and ways to introduce the interview to the particular respondent. To do so, the following questions were answered beforehand:

Research questions:

What is the goal of this interview in relation to our research questions?

Information interviewees:

Why do we interview this group of respondents in relation to our research questions?

Specific interviewee:

What is the situation of this particular respondent? Why do we interview this person in particular? What information do we expect to receive? Are there any specific circumstances to take into account?

Introducing the interview:

How do we introduce ourselves? How do we introduce the project? How does our introduction possibly frame the respondent's answers? What do we say and what don't we say? How do we make the respondent feel at ease? How do we introduce the topic of informed consent?

Interviews recently bereaved

As regards the recently bereaved, our guides consisted of interview topics with possible introductions, research questions, and follow up-topics and questions. What did and did not work in earlier interviews? In view of the specific interviewee, what questions should and should not be asked? What information do we already have and what gaps exist in the previously collected material? The overview of the interview guide given below illustrates the interview topics, and some of the introductory and follow-up questions. During our fieldwork, we adjusted and deepened the guide for each interview.

Interview topic: Deceased

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks general questions about the deceased and the relation between the bereaved and the deceased. This allows the interviewee to talk about the person who has passed away and to adjust to the interview. It allows the researcher to gather information about the bereaved and the deceased.
Introductory questions:	[Name] told me that [your wife] passed away recently. Can you tell me something about [her]?
Follow-up questions:	Can you describe [her] personality? What did she like or value? Can you tell me something about the two of you?
Follow-up topics:	Character, anecdotes, values, goals, relationship, feelings.

Interview topic: Dying

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions regarding the process and moment of dying. By doing so, the topic of death is introduced. What happened to the deceased? How is this experienced? Thereby, room is created for criticism, for example in relation to (perceived) medical failures and social relationships.
Introductory questions:	When [name deceased] passed away, what happened?
Follow-up questions:	How did [she] pass away? Do you remember where you were at that moment? Can you tell me something about how you felt in that moment?
Follow-up topics:	Expected or unexpected death, present or absent at moment of death, positive and negative emotions, experiences of continuity and discontinuity in relation to dying.

Interview topic: Preparing the funeral

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions regarding the practices, motives and feelings that played a role in the period before the funeral ceremony.
Introductory questions:	What do you remember mostly of the days after [the deceased] passed away? Did you help preparing the funeral? Can you tell me something about the preparations?
Follow-up questions:	Did you discuss the funeral with [the deceased] before [her] death? Did you help taking care of [the deceased], dressing or picking clothes? Has there been a wake? Or a moment for close friends and family members to say goodbye? What do you remember of that moment? The funeral was held [in church]. Why did you choose [an ecclesial] ceremony? Was that important? Why? There was a [burial/cremation]. Why did you choose a [burial]? Was that important? Why?
Follow-up topics:	Motives, experiences, emotions, awareness of time, social aspects, presence of the deceased, identity of the deceased, closing the coffin, religion, burial or cremation motives.

Interview topic: Day of the funeral

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions about the funeral performance itself.
Introductory questions:	And then the day of the funeral arrives. Can you tell me something about that?
Follow-up questions:	How did it start? How did you feel? What happened? If you think of the funeral, what do you remember most? Did the funeral provide comfort? How? How did you feel when you arrived back home after the funeral?

Follow-up topics:	Ritual elements in the funeral, presence of friends and family members, funeral director, ritual expert, committal.

Interview topic: Grave and urn

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions about the grave or urn, about the choices for burial or cremation – if those not have been covered already – and about the meaning of the grave or urn.
Introductory questions:	It has been [a while] now since the funeral. Did you visit the grave? Did you pick up the ashes in the crematorium? Can you tell me something about that? How did that happen? How did you feel about that?
Follow-up questions:	How does the grave look like? What does the grave mean to you? Do you visit the grave? Why or why not? Can you tell me something about those visits? What do you experience? Did you retrieve the ashes from the crematorium? Can you tell me something about that experience? Did you do anything with the ashes? Why did you choose to [scatter, bury, do nothing]? Do you plan to do anything with them? Why did you [keep or dispose of] the ashes at that place? What do the ashes mean to you?
Follow-up topics:	Presence or absence of the deceased, comfort, discomfort, other dead, role of the social environment.

Interview topic: Memorials and objects of the deceased

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions regarding objects of the deceased, such as photographs and home memorials, and the meaning of these objects for the interviewee.

Introductory questions:	Did you create a place to remember [the deceased]? You showed me [a memorial place in the home], can you tell me something more about that?
Follow-up questions:	Why did you create the place? When? What does [the object or place] mean to you? Did you change anything about it?
Follow-up topics:	Presence or absence of the deceased, comfort, discomfort, other dead, role of the social environment.

Interview topic: Afterlife beliefs

Description and purpose:	The interviewer asks questions about life after death, following the vocabulary of the interviewee. Religious notions are only used when introduced by the interviewees.
Introductory questions:	Have you ever thought about whether something happens after death? Can you share your thoughts about that?
Follow-up questions:	Did [the deceased] have any ideas about what happens after death? If there is nothing after death, what does death mean to you? If you think there is something after death, can you describe that? What does death mean to you?
Follow-up topics:	Symbolic immortality, heaven, soul, objects, relationships.

Interviews ritual experts

As regards the ritual experts, a similar approach was followed. Our guides again consisted of interview topics with possible introductions, research questions, and follow up-topics and questions. The overview of the interview guide given below illustrates these.

Interview topic: Being a pastor, ritual coach, funeral director

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores what it means to the interviewee to be a [pastor, ritual coach or funeral director]. Attention is given to the content of the job, and the interviewee's motivations to become a [pastor, ritual coach or funeral director].
Introductory questions:	Can you tell me something about your work as [a pastor, ritual coach, funeral director]?
Follow-up questions:	What do you do on a regular day? Why did you become [a pastor]?
Follow-up topics:	Type of church, independent entrepreneur, funeral company, purpose, values, switching jobs.

Interview topic: Conducting funerals

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores why and how the interviewee began to conduct funerals, and asks question about working in the proximity of death.
Introductory questions:	Why did you start conducting funerals? How did you get involved in that field? As a pastor, funerals are part of the job, aren't they? How did you feel about that?
Introductory questions:	Was it a deliberate choice? Was there a higher purpose? Why death? What does it mean to you to work with death?
Follow-up topic:	Contributing to others, own experiences with loss.

Interview topic: Changes in funerals

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores how the interviewee has experienced changes in funerals in the Netherlands.
Introductory questions:	Has there changed anything in funerals, compared to when you started as [a pastor]?
Follow-up questions:	Why did that happen, you think? In your experience, what is the most profound difference?

Follow-up topics:	Secularisation, individualisation, role of the bereaved, new experts, burial, cremation, time to conduct the funeral.

Interview topic: Relation with the bereaved

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores the relation between the ritual expert and the bereaved.
Introductory questions:	How would you describe your role as an expert in relation to the family of the deceased?
Follow-up questions:	Regarding what matters do you guide the immediate bereaved? To what extent? Who is in charge?
Follow up-topics:	Guide, coach, authority.

Interview topic: Preparing the funeral

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores the funeral preparations.
Introductory questions:	Can you tell me something about the ways in which you prepare for the funeral?
Follow-up questions:	Do you have a particular strategy? Why? How do you start the preparations with the family? What must be discussed during the meeting with the family? What happens after the arrangement interview?
Follow-up topics:	Other topics to discuss with the family, number of visits, ritual criticism, social relationships, immediate family and other participants.

Interview topic: Performing the funeral

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores the role of the expert in the funeral.
Introductory questions:	How would you describe your task during the day of the funeral?
Follow-up questions:	Can you tell me something about your interaction with the bereaved? What is their role and what is yours? Who is in charge?

Follow-up topics:	Sudden changes, emotions, purpose funeral, good funeral, time.

Interview topic: After the ceremony

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores the role of the expert after the funeral.
Introductory questions:	Do you play a role after the funeral ceremony? Is there any contact with the family? Why or why not?
Follow-up questions:	Do you think that [this approach] works or should it be different?
Follow-up topics:	Boundaries of the job as ritual expert.

Interview topic: Working together with other experts

Description and purpose:	The interviewer explores the role of the expert in relation to other experts.
Introductory questions:	Conducting a funeral is not a one-man's job. Can you tell me something about the other people you work with? Funeral directors, pastors, ritual coaches, undertakers?
Follow up-questions:	In what areas do you work together? How does the communication go?
Follow-up topics:	Strengths, challenges, possible improvements.

APPENDIX C – QUESTIONNAIRE

Regarding this research project, a survey was developed and spread among Dutch bereaved people who had recently lost an immediate relative or family member. People received the questionnaire either on paper or online, depending on their personal preferences. Together with the questionnaire, they received a letter which explained the survey, the research project, and matters of privacy. Here an English translation of the questionnaire is given:

Part 1: Introduction

To start, we would like to ask you some questions regarding your relationship with the deceased:

What was your relationship with the deceased? He/she was my:
Partner
Parent
Child
Sibling
Grandparent
Grandchild
Uncle/aunt
Brother/ sister in law
Friend
Different, namely: …

To what extent were you involved with the deceased:
1: Very much involved
2: Involved
3: Neutral
4: Not involved
5: Not involved at all

Did the deceased belong to a religious community? If so, which?
Yes, Catholic
Yes, Protestant
Different, namely: …
No

Do you belong to a religious community? If so, which?
Yes, Catholic
Yes, Protestant
Different, namely: …
No

How many weeks ago did the funeral take place? …

Part 2: Dying

The following question refers to the moment of death:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:
Losing my loved one feels like a turning point in my life
When I heard about his/her death, it felt as if my world stopped turning
When my loved one passed away, I realised things would no longer be the same

Part 3: The funeral

A. Choices regarding the funeral

The following questions refer to the choices that have been made regarding the funeral:

The funeral was performed in *(multiple responses possible):*
A church
The hall of the crematorium or funeral home
Different, namely: …

The funeral was led by *(multiple responses possible):*
The family
Funeral director
Religious celebrant (for example pastor, minister, imam)
Ritual coach
Humanistic celebrant
Different, namely: …

The following statements refer to the choice for this type of funeral. Please indicate to what extent you agree with them:

It was the wish of the deceased to have this type of funeral
This type of funeral fits well with us and our way of life
We chose this type of funeral because of the celebrant
We chose this type of funeral because we wanted a personal goodbye
We chose this type of funeral because of our faith
We chose this type of funeral because of the beautiful location
It was self-evident that the funeral would look like this
We chose this type of funeral because of our non-religious worldview
This type of funeral was chosen in view of the religious community of the deceased

Part 3: The funeral

B. Experiences regarding the funeral

We would like to ask you some specific questions about the funeral ceremony. Can you please indicate how important the following things were to you?

How important was it to be present at the funeral ceremony?

How important were the following elements of the funeral ceremony to you? *When the element did not occur, you can tick the 'does not apply' box.*
Carrying the deceased inside
Lighting candles around the bier
The personal stories that were told
The biblical readings
The prayers that were said
The music that was played
The moments of silence
The presence of a picture, or a personal attribute of the deceased
The preach or meditation
A poem that was presented
The celebration of the Communion, Last Supper, or Eucharist
The blessing of the deceased, the incense or the sprinkling with water
Saying goodbye at the end of the ceremony
The committal of the deceased (the actual cremation after the ceremony, or the actual burial at the cemetery)

When you think back to the funeral, what element most strongly comes to mind? …

Can you indicate to what extent the following feelings played a role?
Warmth
Comfort
Strength
Love
Peace
Connectedness
Care
Safety
Proudness
Helplessness
Loneliness

The following statements concern your experiences during the funeral. Can you indicate to what extent you agree with these statements?
The funeral felt like a moment that existed outside of time
I felt closely connected to the deceased
I felt my life changed radically
My bond with the deceased was very tangible
It felt as if my world stopped turning
I could let go of the deceased
I had no awareness of time
I felt that the deceased was close to me
I experienced the funeral as a moment of change
I was able to say goodbye to the deceased

The following statements refer to the content of the funeral. Should the following topics play a role in the funeral? Can you indicate to what extent you agree with these statements?
Who the deceased was, must be expressed during the funeral
What the deceased has meant to me should come to the fore in the funeral
The faith of the deceased should be expressed in the funeral
Personal characteristics of the deceased should play a role during the funeral
What the deceased has meant for society must be emphasised in the funeral

The belief in God should be expressed in the ceremony
The deceased should take centre stage in the ceremony
What the deceased had meant to the bereaved should come to the fore in the funeral
A hopeful message must be conveyed during the funeral

Part 3: The funeral

C. Social aspects

At a funeral, other family members, relatives, and friends can be present as well. The following questions refer thereto:

Can you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?
In the situation of loss, you feel connected to the people around you
I felt supported by the people around me during the funeral
During the funeral, it is about the core values of the deceased and the bereaved
When someone dies, you share a feeling of connectedness with your dearest and nearest
During the funeral, everyone, regardless of money or property, has the same goal
In the face of death, you feel one with the people around you
Feeling closely attached to others has helped me to say goodbye to the deceased
During the funeral, all people want to say goodbye in a good way
The support of other people has guided me through the process of saying goodbye

How strong did you feel connected during the funeral with the following people?
My immediate family
My relatives
My friends
My colleagues
My faith community
Everyone that was present

Part 4: Burial or Cremation

We would like to ask you some specific questions regarding the burial or cremation. Please take note of the references behind questions.

The choice was made for a:
Burial
Cremation → *please continue with question 24*
Different, namely: … → *please continue with question 29*

Part 4a: Burial

Have you been present at the internment? *(the actual burial at the cemetery)*
Yes
No → *please continue with question 21*

How important was it for you to be present at the internment?

We would like to know why people choose for a burial. Can you indicate to what extent the following motives played a role in choosing a burial?
The deceased wished to be buried
The idea of cremation, of fire, seems unpleasant to me
When you bury someone, you have a place to visit
I think cremation is a scary idea
I think the symbolism of earth is beautiful
Other family members have been buried as well
I view burial as a natural process
We chose to bury because of religious motives

Have you visited the grave of the deceased since the funeral?
Yes
No

Can you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?
The grave is important to me
I view the grave as a special (extraordinary or sacred) place
At the grave, I feel that the deceased is with me

→ *Please continue with question 29*

Part 4b: Cremation

Have you been present at the incineration/ cremation of the deceased? *(The actual cremation in the crematorium)*
Yes
No → *please continue with question 26*

How important was it for you to be present at the incineration?

We would like to know why people choose for a cremation. Can you indicate to what extent the following motives played a role in choosing a cremation?
The deceased wished to be cremated
Because of the possibilities surrounding ash disposal (scatterings, urns, grave)
No one needs to feel responsible about maintaining or visiting the grave
The idea of being buried underground seems unpleasant to me
Cremation is less expensive than burial
Other family members have been cremated as well
We chose cremation because of religious motives
In my view, a cremation is more clean than a burial

What do you intend to do with the ashes?/ What did you do with the ashes? *(multiple responses possible)*
Scattering
Urn grave
Keep the urn at home
Divide among family members
Creating an object or jewellery with the ashes
I don't know
Nothing
Different, namely: …

Can you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?
The urn or ashes are important to me
I view the urn or ashes as special (extraordinary or sacred)
Near the urn or the ashes, I feel that the deceased is with me

Part 5: Memorial places

The following questions refer to having a memorial place at home:

Sometimes, people create a special place at home to remember their deceased, for example with pictures, objects, candles and/or flowers. Do you have a special place at home to remember your loved ones?

Yes
No → *please continue with question 31*

Can you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?
The domestic memorial is important to me
I view the memorial place as a special (extraordinary or sacred) place
Near the memorial, I feel that the deceased is with me

Part 6: Living on and remembering

We would like to ask you some specific questions about remembering the deceased and about the continuing existence of the deceased:

Can you indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements?
The deceased lives on in my memory
I experience the presence of the deceased in his/her personal belongings, such as jewellery, clothes and objects in the home
The soul of the deceased lives on in the afterlife
The deceased lives on in my heart
The deceased will rise from the dead
The life of the deceased has ended forever
The soul of the deceased lives on after death
The deceased lives on in the things that he or she has created, such as works, books, or art
The deceased lives on through his/her loved ones, like children, parents, friends, and colleagues
The deceased goes to heaven
The body of the deceased lives on after death
My deceased loved one lives on in my thoughts
The deceased does not live on after death
After death, there will be a resurrection or rise of the dead

Part 7: After the funeral

The following question concerns the period after the funeral:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
Since the funeral, I feel I have entered a new phase in life
After the funeral, life has moved on
Now that the deceased is no longer here, I have to find a new place in my social environment (among family, relatives, or friends)

Part 8: Worldviews

The following questions relate to your worldviews:
To what extent do you consider yourself to be religious?

To what extent do you consider yourself to be spiritual?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
My worldviews highly influence my daily life
My worldviews highly influence how I deal with death
When someone passes away, you think a lot about the deep questions of life
In my daily life, I think a lot about questions of the meaning of life

How would you describe your own worldview? …

Part 9: To conclude

Lastly, we would like to ask you some general questions:

Wat is your sex? m/f
What is your year of birth? …
What is your place of residence? …
What is your profession? …
What is your highest level of education?
Do you have any comments or remarks about the questionnaire? Or anything else you would like to share with us? …
May we contact you in view of further research?

Thank you very much for answering the questions!

APPENDIX D – GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION RESPONDENTS

APPENDIX E – INFORMATION INTERVIEWEES

Interviews ritual experts (2012 – 2013)

Regarding ritual experts, four ministers of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (one Lutheran, one Dutch Reformed, two Reformed Churches), four pastors of the Roman Catholic Church (two priests, two pastoral workers), two funeral directors, and ten ritual coaches (of whom one had and one still worked as a pastoral worker in the Roman Catholic Church) were interviewed.

Interviews recently bereaved (2014)

Respondent 1: Nellie is a sixty-two-year-old woman. She had lost her mother seven months prior to our interview, and had taken care of her during the last years of her life in her own home. She is an active member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and was raised in the Lutheran Church. The funeral was performed in church, and ended with a burial.

Respondent 2: Marga is a sixty-year-old woman. She had lost her mother four months prior to our interview, and the earlier deaths of her father and her husband were important during our conversations. Before the interview, Marga had invited us to participate in the funeral preparations and the funeral ceremony of her mother. She was raised Roman Catholic, and had recently switched to of a liberal Catholic community. The funeral was a cremation with a double ceremony, in church and in the crematorium.

Respondent 3: Cor is an eighty-two-year-old man. He had lost his wife seven months prior to our interview. She had been ill during the last five years of her life, and had passed away in a hospice close to their home. He was a member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and was raised in the Lutheran Church. The funeral was a cremation, performed at the crematorium.

Respondent 4: Marja is a fifty-year-old woman, who had suddenly lost her mother seven months prior to our interview. She was religiously unaffiliated, but had been raised in the Roman Catholic Church. The funeral was a cremation, performed at the crematorium.

Respondent 5: Jan is a sixty-year-old man who had lost his father two months prior to our interview. He is an active member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, raised in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The funeral was performed in church, and ended with a burial.

Respondent 6: Yvonne is a fifty-three-year-old woman. She had lost her brother Tim seven months prior to our interview, after a long battle against cancer, and she had cared for her brother during his illness in her own home. After the death of her brother, she had also lost both of her parents. She was religiously unaffiliated and the funeral was a cremation, which was performed at the crematorium.

Respondent 7: Johan is a fifty-nine-year-old man, who had lost his father as well as his brother within six months. He was a member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, but "less involved today" than he was ten years ago. He was raised in the Dutch Reformed Church. The funerals were both burials, his father's in church, his brother's in the auditorium of the cemetery. We conducted the interview respectively six and nine months after his loved ones had passed away.

Respondent 8: René and Karin are a couple in their sixties. She had lost her mother four months prior to the interview. Both were members of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, and raised in the Dutch Reformed Church. The funeral was performed in church, and ended with a burial.

Respondent 9: Bettie is an eighty-four-year-old woman. She had lost her husband a year prior to our interview, and is an active member of the Roman Catholic Church. The funeral was performed in church, and ended with a burial.

Respondent 10: Gerrit is an eighty-four-year-old man. He had lost his wife a year prior to our interview, and is an active member of the Roman Catholic Church. The funeral was performed in church, after which the cremation took place. Together with Heleen, he was part of a mourning group in church.

Respondent 11: Heleen was a sixty-six-year-old woman. She had lost her husband eight months prior to our interview, after a long period of illness. She had been an active member of the Roman Catholic Church, but did not see herself as a devout Catholic. The funeral was performed in church, after which the crema-

tion took place. Together with Gerrit, she was part of a mourning group in church.

Respondent 12: Elizabeth, was a seventy-nine-year-old woman who had lost her husband four months prior to our interview. She was an active member of the Roman Catholic Church. The funeral was performed in church, after which the cremation took place.

Respondent 13: Charles was a fifty-seven-year-old man with no religious affiliation. He had lost his wife to early onset Alzheimer's decease, three months prior to our interview. The non-ecclesial funeral was held in a small church, and was concluded with a burial.

Respondent 14: Anna is a seventy-seven-year-old woman. She had lost her husband two months prior to our interview, and was religiously unaffiliated. The funeral was a cremation, performed at the crematorium.

Respondent 15: Lisa is a thirty-four-year-old woman, and Charles' daughter. She had lost her mother to early onset Alzheimer's decease, four months prior to our interview. She was religiously unaffiliated, and the non-ecclesial funeral was held in a little church in the neighbourhood. The funeral ended with a burial.

APPENDIX F – FACTOR ANALYSES

For all factor analyses (Principle Axis Factoring, Oblimin Rotation Method) we followed the same approach. Criteria used in the analyses are commonality >.20; factor loadings >.30, and if items load high on two factors, the difference in factor loading should be >.15. The number of factors to retain in the analysis is based on a joined interpretation of the Eigenvalues (>1) as well as on Parallel Analysis and the Velicer's Minimum Average Partial (MAP) Test (O'Connor 2000). These last two procedures are not based on a rule of thumb, but allow the researcher to look at the relative amount of variance by comparing the Eigenvalues of the factor analysis to the Eigenvalues of a random sample.

Meaning in funerals

Table 7 shows the Principle Axis Factoring of 8 of 9 items in our questionnaire regarding the meaning that must be expressed in funerals according to the dearest and nearest bereaved. One item was removed in previous steps because of a low commonality (<.20). Eigenvalues are > 1, the MAP test gave two components, as did the Parallel Analysis (Root 1: Eigen = 2.85 > percentile = .49; Root 2: Eigen = 1.43 > percentile = .31). The final analysis results in a total explained variance of 60.6 % and a KMO of .78.

TABLE 7 FACTOR ANALYSIS ON MEANING IN FUNERALS (PAF), COMMONALITIES (H^2), PERCENTAGE OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE, AND RELIABILITY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

ITEMS	F1	F2	H^2
PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DECEASED SHOULD PLAY A ROLE IN THE FUNERAL	**.810**	-.022	.654
WHAT THE DECEASED HAD MEANT TO THE BEREAVED SHOULD COME TO THE FORE IN THE FUNERAL	**.762**	.068	.594
WHO THE DECEASED WAS SHOULD BE EXPRESSED DURING THE FUNERAL	**.760**	-.009	.576
WHAT THE DECEASED HAS MEANT FOR SOCIETY SHOULD BE EXPRESSED DURING THE FUNERAL	**.626**	.141	.426
THE DECEASED SHOULD TAKE CENTRE STAGE IN THE CEREMONY	**.580**	-.199	.357
WHAT THE DECEASED HAS MEANT TO ME SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN THE FUNERAL	**.571**	.049	.333
THE BELIEF IN GOD SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN THE CEREMONY	.024	**.946**	.899
THE FAITH OF THE DECEASED SHOULD BE EXPRESSED IN THE FUNERAL	.012	**.817**	.670
EIGENVALUE	3.51	1.94	
% EXPLAINED VARIANCE	39.0%	21.6%	60.6%
CRONBACH'S ALPHA	.83	.88	
SCALE MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION)	4.3 (.58)	3.0 (1.20)	
NUMBER OF VALID CASES	192	192	192

SCALE: 1= TOTALLY DISAGREE; 2=DISAGREE; 3=NEUTRAL; 4=AGREE; 5=TOTALLY AGREE. F1 = PERSONAL; F2 = TRANSPERSONAL

Non-traditional afterlife beliefs

Table 8 shows the Principle Axis Factoring (Oblimin Rotation Method) of 6 items in our questionnaire on non-traditional afterlife beliefs. The final factor analysis results in a total explained variance of 68%, and a KMO of .81. One Eigenvalues is > 1, the Map Test gave one component whereas the Parallel Analysis extracted two (Root 1: Eigen = 2.60 > percentile = .42; Root 2: Eigen = .30 > percentile = .27). Based on these results as well as the high percentage of explained variance, we worked with two factors in the analysis.

TABLE 8 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF NON-TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS (PAF), COMMONALITIES (H^2), EIGENVALUES, PERCENTAGE OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE, AND RELIABILITY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

ITEMS	F1	F2	H^2
MY DECEASED LOVED ONE LIVES ON IN MY THOUGHTS	**.871**	-.009	.748
THE DECEASED LIVES ON IN MY HEART	**.787**	.068	.697
THE DECEASED LIVES ON IN MY MEMORY	**.734**	-.016	.523
THE DECEASED LIVES ON IN THE THINGS THAT HE/SHE HAS CREATED, SUCH AS WORKS, BOOKS, OR ART	-.089	**.776**	.516
THE DECEASED LIVES ON THROUGH HIS/HER LOVED ONES, SUCH AS CHILDREN, PARENTS, FRIENDS, AND COLLEAGUES	.117	**.594**	.461
I EXPERIENCE THE PRESENCE OF THE DECEASED IN HIS/HER PERSONAL BELONGINGS, SUCH AS JEWELLERY, CLOTHES AND OR OBJECTS IN THE HOME	.044	**.425**	.208
EIGENVALUE	3.14	.94	
% OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE	52.3%	15.7%	68.0%
CRONBACH'S ALPHA	.85	.62	
SCALE MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION)	4.6 (.55)	3,8 (.78)	
NUMBER OF VALID CASES	191	191	

SCALE: 1= TOTALLY DISAGREE; 2=DISAGREE; 3=NEUTRAL; 4=AGREE; 5=TOTALLY AGREE. F1 = IMMATERIAL; F2 = MATERIAL

Traditional afterlife beliefs

Table 9 shows the Principle Axis Factoring (Oblimin Rotation Method) of 6 items in our questionnaire on traditional afterlife beliefs. The final factor analysis results in a total explained variance of 79.7%, and a KMO of .83. One Eigenvalues is > 1, the Map Test gave one component whereas the Parallel Analysis extracted two (Root 1: Eigen = 3.57 > percentile = .42; Root 2: Eigen = .44 > percentile = .27). Based on these results as well as the high percentage of explained variance, we worked with two factors in the analysis.

TABLE 9 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL AFTERLIFE BELIEFS (PAF), COMMONALITIES (H^2), EIGENVALUES, PERCENTAGE OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE, AND RELIABILITY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

ITEMS	F1	F2	H^2
THE DECEASED WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD	**.967**	.015	.915
AFTER DEATH, THERE WILL BE A RESURRECTION OR RISE OF THE DEAD	**.838**	-.095	.825
THE BODY OF THE DECEASED LIVES ON AFTER DEATH	**.530**	-.018	.267
THE SOUL OF THE DECEASED LIVES ON IN THE AFTERLIFE	-.048	**-.952**	.843
THE SOUL OF THE DECEASED LIVES ON AFTER DEATH	-.024	**-.829**	.660
THE DECEASED GOES TO HEAVEN	.230	**-.641**	.675
EIGENVALUE	3.90	.88	
% OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE	65.0%	14.7%	79.7%
CRONBACH'S ALPHA	.83	.88	
SCALE MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION)	2.4 (.98)	3.2 (1.08)	
NUMBER OF VALID CASES	191	191	

SCALE: 1= TOTALLY DISAGREE; 2=DISAGREE; 3=NEUTRAL; 4=AGREE; 5=TOTALLY AGREE. F1 = MATERIAL; F2 = IMMATERIAL

Rites of passage

Table 10 shows the Principle Axis Factoring (Oblimin Rotation Method) of 10 0f 11 items in our questionnaire on experiences of rites of passage; separation, transition and incorporation. One item was removed in previous steps because of a low commonality (<.20). The second analysis produced one factor loading of 1.02. Therefore, we adjusted the delta in the Oblimin Rotation to -0.2. The final factor analysis results in a total explained variance of 65,2%, and a KMO of .91. Both Eigenvalues are > 1, the Map Test extracted two components, and so did the Parallel Analysis (Root 1: Eigen = 5.05 > percentile = .54; Root 2: Eigen = .54 > percentile = .37).

TABLE 10 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF RITES OF PASSAGE (PAF), COMMONALITIES (H^2), EIGENVALUES, PERCENTAGE OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE, AND RELIABILITY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

ITEMS	F1	F2	H^2
I FELT AS IF MY WORLD STOPPED TURNING	**.999**	-.141	.829
I FELT MY LIFE CHANGED RADICALLY	**.727**	.182	.738
THE FUNERAL FELT LIKE A MOMENT THAT EXISTED OUTSIDE OF TIME	**.718**	.021	.536
I HAD NO AWARENESS OF TIME	**.672**	.031	.480
WHEN I HEARD ABOUT HIS/HER DEATH, IT FELT AS IF MY WORLD STOPPED TURNING	**.632**	.208	.618
I EXPERIENCED THE FUNERAL AS A MOMENT OF CHANGE	**.535**	.216	.487
LOSING MY LOVED ONE FEELS LIKE A TURNING POINT IN MY LIFE	-.003	**.824**	.675
SINCE THE FUNERAL, I FEEL I HAVE ENTERED A NEW PHASE IN LIFE	.031	**.712**	.538
WHEN MY LOVED ONE PASSED AWAY, I REALISED THINGS WOULD NO LONGER BE THE SAME	.247	**.532**	.519
NOW THAT THE DECEASED IS NO LONGER HERE, I HAVE TO FIND A NEW PLACE IN MY SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT (FAMILY, RELATIVES, FRIENDS)	.125	**.442**	.285
EIGENVALUE	5.49	1.03	
% OF VARIANCE	54.9 %	10.3 %	65,2 %
CRONBACH'S ALPHA	.88	.82	
SCALE MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION)	3.24 (1.0)	3.64 (.90)	
NUMBER OF VALID CASES	191	193	

SCALE: 1= TOTALLY DISAGREE TO 5=TOTALLY AGREE. F1 = SOCIAL/TEMPORAL LIMINALITY; F2 = TRANSITIONAL LIMINALITY

Transforming bonds

Table 11 shows the Principle Axis Factoring (Oblimin Rotation Method) of 5 items in our questionnaire on transforming bonds. The final factor analysis results in a total explained variance of 75,1%, and a KMO of .66. Both Eigenvalues are > 1, the Map Test extracted two components, and so did the Parallel Analysis (Root 1: Eigen = 1.83 > percentile = .35; Root 2: Eigen = .72 > percentile = .17).

TABLE 11 FACTOR ANALYSIS OF CONTINUING BONDS (PAF), COMMONALITIES (H^2), PERCENTAGE OF EXPLAINED VARIANCE, AND RELIABILITY (CRONBACH'S ALPHA)

ITEMS	F1	F2	H^2
MY BOND WITH THE DECEASED WAS VERY TANGIBLE	**.860**	-.086	.555
I FELT CLOSELY CONNECTED TO THE DECEASED	**.805**	.097	.530
I FELT THAT THE DECEASED WAS CLOSE TO ME	**.637**	-.026	.339
I COULD LET GO OF THE DECEASED	-.263	**.712**	.303
I WAS ABLE TO SAY GOODBYE TO THE DECEASED	.329	**.674**	.330
EIGENVALUE	2.35	1.40	
% EXPLAINED VARIANCE	47.0%	28.1%	75.1%
CRONBACH'S ALPHA	.79	.57	
SCALE MEAN (STANDARD DEVIATION)	4.2 (.81)	3.8 (.91)	
NUMBER OF VALID CASES	193	193	

SCALE: 1= TOTALLY DISAGREE; 2=DISAGREE; 3=NEUTRAL; 4=AGREE; 5=TOTALLY AGREE. F1 = CONTINUING BONDS; F2 = DISCONTINUING BONDS

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

ZIN- EN VORMGEVEN AAN DE DOOD

RITUELE PRAKTIJKEN EN SITUATIONELE GELOOFSVOORSTELLINGEN VAN NABESTAANDEN IN NEDERLAND

Het overlijden van een naaste is een universele en vaak ingrijpende gebeurtenis. Met het verlies dringt zich aan de achterblijvers een zoektocht naar betekenis op. De sociale en emotionele breuk, die met de dood haar intrede doet in het leven van nabestaanden, dient geheeld te worden en er moet iets gebeuren met het lichaam van de overledene. Hoewel nabestaanden op verschillende manieren reageren op de confrontatie met de dood, kan men de dood niet vermijden of negeren. Wie je ook bent, waar je ook leeft en wat je ook gelooft, de dood vraagt om een sociaal en cultureel antwoord van en voor de levenden. In de praktijk krijgt dit antwoord vorm in rituele repertoires: assemblages van rituele handelingen die nabestaanden houvast bieden en hen helpen zin en vorm te geven aan de dood. Wanneer rituele repertoires werken, begeleiden ze de overledene en diens nabestaanden naar een nieuwe sociale en/of fysieke bestemming, helpen ze nabestaanden uitdrukking te geven aan het verlies, en creëren ze een kader om dit verlies een plek te geven in hun leven en het met anderen te delen.

Dat ritueel werkt, is echter niet vanzelfsprekend in het Nederland van nu. Diverse sociaal-maatschappelijke veranderingen, zoals de ontkerkelijking en individualisering, hebben hun sporen nagelaten in de uitvaartpraktijk. De afgelopen decennia is er een dynamische – en ook typisch Nederlandse – uitvaartcultuur ontstaan, mede beïnvloed door het geprofessionaliseerde uitvaartwezen. Nieuwe mogelijkheden rond uitvaart en lijkbezorging hebben de praktijken, wensen en inspraak van betrokkenen beïnvloed. En hoewel dit volop mogelijkheden en keuzevrijheid biedt aan nabestaanden, brengen de veranderingen ook uitdagingen en onzekerheden met zich mee. Het zijn tegenwoordig niet zozeer de religieuze of funeraire experts, maar vooral de nabestaanden zelf die de verantwoordelijkheid dragen om de uitvaart op een ‘goede’ manier in te vullen. Maar hoe doe je dat? Welke handvatten zijn voorhanden om te antwoorden op de dood van een dierbare? En wat onthullen op-maat-gemaakte rituele praktijken over de persoonlijke voorkeuren en identiteiten van nabestaanden en hun betekenisverlening aan leven en dood?

Rituele praktijken en betekenisverlening rond de dood

Het doel van deze studie is in kaart te brengen hoe rooms-katholieke, protestantse en niet-kerkelijke nabestaanden in Nederland betekenis zoeken, creëren en toeschrijven in confrontatie met de dood door middel van rituele praktijken en situationele geloofsvoorstellingen. We bestuderen de rituele praktijken en voorstellingen van mensen met een recente verlieservaring in het licht van de veranderende rol van religie, de individualisering, en de ontwikkeling van crematie in de Nederlandse samenleving. Daarbij maken we gebruik van twee theoretische hoofdconcepten die onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden zijn: rituele praktijk en rituele betekenis. Op basis van empirisch onderzoek, bestaande uit participerende observaties in uitvaartondernemingen (6 maanden), diepte-interviews met nabestaanden (n=15) en rituele experts (n=20), en surveyonderzoek onder nabestaanden (n=198), volgen we nabestaanden in hun zoektocht naar betekenis. Elk hoofdstuk richt zich op een specifieke fase in het uitvaartproces: de voorbereidingen rond de uitvaart (hoofdstuk 2 en 3), de uitvaart en lijkbezorging zelf (hoofdstuk 2, 3 en 4), en de periode na de uitvaart (hoofdstuk 5 en 6).

Rituele praktijk

In deze studie hebben we rituelen rond de dood bestudeerd als behorende tot een specifiek genre rituelen: *rites de passages*, welke zich kenmerken door separatie-, transitie- en incorporatieriten die een overgang bewerkstelligen tussen verschillende levensfasen Deze riten zijn nauw verbonden met de relaties tussen de levenden en de dode. Ze krijgen vorm op basis van de manieren waarop de ‘ziel’ van de overledene, het lichaam van de overledene en de periode van rouw onder nabestaanden zich tot elkaar verhouden. Wanneer de representaties van de overledene een uiteindelijk en vredig karakter hebben gekregen in het bewustzijn van de achterblijvers, kunnen we het overgangsritueel als voltooid beschouwen. Daarbij rijst de vraag of en wanneer dat gebeurt. Deze studie definieert rituelen rond de dood als een langdurig proces van separatie-, transitie- en incorporatieriten, die vorm krijgen op basis van de manieren waarop nabestaanden de materiële en immateriële conditie van de overledene begrijpen. Op die manier illustreren we dat rituelen rond de dood verder reiken dan de uitvaart en haar voorbereiding – welke in de Nederlandse uitvaartpraktijk centraal staan – en dat nabestaanden ook na de uitvaart praktijken, voorstellingen en emoties toeschrijven aan hun relatie met de overledene.

Rituele betekenis

De rituele praktijken van mensen zijn nauw met betekenis verbonden. Hoewel ritueel zelf niet per se betekenisvol is, proberen mensen door middel van ritueel handelen weldegelijk betekenis te zoeken en te creëren. Daarnaast schrijven mensen betekenis toe aan de voorbereiding en uitvoering van praktijken. Wij zijn geïnteresseerd in de manieren waarop betekenissen ontstaan en verbeeld worden in het proces van ritueel vormgeven aan de dood. In het licht van onze focus op religie en ritueel, zijn we in het bijzonder geïnteresseerd in geloofsvoorstellingen (*beliefs)* en de manieren waarop deze beleefd en gepraktiseerd worden door nabestaanden. De term 'geloofsvoorstelling' heeft dus niets slechts betrekking op voorstellingen van mensen en de articulatie van voorstellingen, maar ook op praktijken.

Situationele geloofsvoorstellingen

In deze studie staan situationele geloofsvoorstellingen centraal. Martin Stringer heeft laten zien dat mensen specifieke geloofsvoorstellingen als feiten articuleren en introduceren in specifieke situaties voor specifieke doeleinden. De empirische waarheid van dergelijke voorstellingen is irrelevant, in die zin dat ze als voor waar worden aangenomen. Bovenal vormen geloofsvoorstellingen geen alomvattend systeem, maar worden ze efficiënt ingezet en weer terzijde geschoven wanneer ze niet langer nodig zijn. Verder bordurend op het werk van Stringer, illustreert deze studie dat geloofsvoorstellingen niet alleen worden gearticuleerd, maar ook worden gepraktiseerd. De verbale en non-verbale praktijken van mensen worden beïnvloed door situationele geloofsvoorstellingen en geven deze tegelijkertijd vorm. Zo geven situationele geloofsvoorstellingen iets prijs van de betekenisverlening door nabestaanden.

Het zijn met name situationele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen die aandacht krijgen in deze studie naar de omgang met de dood. Hiernamaalsvoorstellingen worden begrepen als ideeën en praktijken die een voortbestaan na de dood impliciet en/of expliciet uitdrukken. We zijn daarbij zowel geïnteresseerd in de manieren waarop uitingen van nabestaanden zich verhouden tot traditionele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen, zoals ze binnen de christelijke traditie gedacht worden, als in de manieren waarop hiernamaalsvoorstellingen vorm krijgen in materiële praktijken. Om dit te verkennen maken we gebruik van twee concepten, symbolische onsterfelijkheid en *continuing bonds*. Met behulp van deze concepten illustreren we hoe mensen vormgeven aan het idee dat er 'iets' van hun overledene blijft voortbestaan op een bepaalde plaats.

Symbolische onsterfelijkheid

Aan het concept symbolische onsterfelijkheid, geïntroduceerd door Robert J. Lifton en Eric Olson, ligt de observatie ten grondslag dat mensen beelden en symbolen creëren die het individuele zelf overstijgen. Zo zijn mensen in staat om na de dood deel te blijven nemen aan het leven, zonder de realiteit van de dood te ontkennen. Lifton en Olson beschrijven vijf modaliteiten van symbolische onsterfelijkheid. In *biologische* of *biosociale* zin wordt het leven van cel op cel doorgegeven. Mensen leven daarbij voort in hun (klein)kinderen, maar ook in hun sociale relaties. In *creatieve* zin leven zij voort in de werken die ze achterlaten en de levenslessen die ze aan anderen meegeven. Hier voegen wij een *materiële* dimensie aan toe: mensen leven niet alleen voort in de dingen die ze zelf gecreëerd hebben, maar ook in voorwerpen die metonymisch of metaforisch met hen geassocieerd worden. Ten derde overstijgen mensen het leven op '*natuurlijke'* wijze. De levenscycli in de natuur worden in verband gebracht met het eigen sterven en voortleven, maar ook het feit dat de aarde zelf voortbestaat is een voorwaarde voor hiernamaalsvoorstellingen. Als er geen plaats is voor onze beelden van voortleven, eindigt het leven. Daarnaast onderscheiden Lifton en Olson *religieuze* ideeën van een voortbestaan na de dood, welke mensen aan een principe van eeuwigheid verbinden. Tot slot beschrijven zij de modaliteit van *experiëntele transcendentie*. Deze vorm van voortbestaan refereert aan de ervaring de limieten van zelf, tijd, plaats en dood te kunnen overstijgen en ligt ten grondslag aan de andere vormen van symbolische onsterfelijkheid.

Continuing bonds

Gedurende de hele 20e eeuw zijn de relaties tussen levenden en doden onderwerp geweest van onderzoek. Daarbij werd lange tijd het onderscheid tussen leven en dood, en de wereld van de levenden en doden, benadrukt. In dit *breaking bonds* narratief werd het loslaten van de dood en de doden geprioriteerd, wat resulteerde in hun sociale en ruimtelijke segregatie. Geïnformeerd door selectieve lezingen van theoretici als Freud, Bowlby en Kübler-Ross, werd rouw beschreven als een reeks van fasen waar ieder individu doorheen *moet* om uiteindelijk te kunnen 'genezen'. Hoewel de doden niet volledig vergeten hoefden te worden, werden zij niet geacht een actieve rol te spelen in de levens van nabestaanden. Diverse onderzoekers hebben laten zien dat dit geresulteerd heeft in de marginalisering van rouw en van voortgaande banden tussen de levenden en doden. In reactie op het *breaking bonds* discours ontstond in de jaren 90 een ander dominant narratief dat benadrukte dat relaties met de doden normaal waren

in plaats van pathologisch en niet noodzakelijk beëindigd hoefden te worden. *Continuing bonds* werd het dominante paradigma en rouw werd steeds meer begrepen als een voortdurend proces van accommodatie.

Sindsdien hebben diverse onderzoekers geïllustreerd hoe nabestaanden hun relaties met de overledenen continueren. Hoewel deze studies de veelheid aan vormen benadrukken waarin banden met de doden voortbestaan, blijft de dynamiek van postmortale relaties veelal onderbelicht. Continuïteit is een nieuwe norm geworden, die zowel de afwezigheid als discontinuïteit van postmortale relaties verhult. Onze studie illustreert de dynamiek van postmortale relaties door te kijken naar het samenspel van continuïteit en discontinuïteit, aanwezigheid en afwezigheid en nabijheid en afstand. Vanuit een ritueel perspectief verkennen we de incorporatiepraktijken van nabestaanden. We illustreren hoe zij hun relatie met de overledene transformeren en daarmee ook een verandering bewerkstelligen in de eigen sociale status en die van de overledene.

Het langdurige proces van ritueel vormgeven aan de dood

Gegrond in het zojuist beschreven theoretische kader, geeft deze studie antwoord op de volgende onderzoeksvraag: *Welke situationele geloofsvoorstellingen ontstaan in de uitvaart- en rouwpraktijken van rooms-katholieke, protestantse en religieus ongeaffilieerde nabestaanden in Nederland?* In de hoofdstukken twee tot en met zes volgen we nabestaanden in hun uitvaart- en rouwpraktijken en worden antwoorden geformuleerd op verschillende sub vragen, zoals hieronder samengevat. Hierin staan telkens twee aspecten centraal. Ten eerste illustreren we hoe recente nabestaanden hun rituele praktijken en geloofsvoorstellingen opnieuw uitvinden en verbeelden met het oog op hun specifieke persoonlijke situatie en de sociaal-culturele omstandigheden in Nederland. Ten tweede benadrukken we dat rituele praktijken onderdeel zijn van een langdurige en in hoge mate geïndividualiseerde zoektocht naar betekenis.

De co-creatie van de uitvaart

In de hoofdstukken 2 en 3 geven we een antwoord op de vraag *welke rituele handelingen we kunnen observeren in de uitvaartvoorbereidingen van rooms-katholieke, protestantse en niet-kerkelijke nabestaanden, en welke rituele actoren een rol spelen in dit proces*. Onze observaties laten zien dat drie elementen centraal staan tijdens de uitvaartvoorbereidingen: het gesprek met de uitvaartondernemer of -verzorger, vaak het regelgesprek genoemd, het gesprek over de inhoud van de uitvaart, en de zorg rond het lichaam van de overledene.

De praktische en inhoudelijke voorbereidingen

In Nederland dient de overledene, zoals vastgelegd in de Wet op de Lijkbezorging, binnen zes werkdagen begraven of gecremeerd te worden, wat resulteert in een voorbereidingsweek. Deze week vangt aan met een gesprek tussen de nabestaanden en een uitvaartverzorger. Er wordt een kist gekozen, een locatie geboekt en er wordt een plan gemaakt voor de verdere voorbereidingsweek. Hoewel het faciliteren van de uitvaart centraal staat, zijn deze voorbereidingen niet slechts functioneel. De praktische mogelijkheden, vaak verbonden met de verzekeringsvoorwaarden en faciliteiten qua tijd en ruimte, zijn dan ook geenszins de enige leidraad in het gesprek. Het is met name de levensstijl van de overledene en diens nabestaanden die voorop staat, en die de doodstijl beïnvloedt: de manier waarop nabestaanden praktisch en inhoudelijk vormgeven aan het verlies van een naaste (Davies 2015).

Ook waar het de inhoud van de uitvaart betreft, zien we dat nabestaanden een prominente rol vervullen. Zij geven steeds vaker zelf vorm aan de uitvaart, ondersteund door de uitvaartverzorger waar nodig of gewenst. In het geval van een kerkelijke uitvaart, of wanneer nabestaanden de uitvaart niet zelf willen of kunnen vormgeven, kan er een andere religieuze of niet-religieuze expert worden ingezet. Er vindt dan een tweede voorbereidingsgesprek plaats. Zoals in het regelgesprek staat ook hier de levensstijl van de betrokkenen centraal. Het levensverhaal van de overledene, zoals dat wordt verwoord door nabestaanden, is *de* bron voor het creëren van de uitvaart, onafhankelijk van het kerkelijke of niet-kerkelijke karakter van de ceremonie. Door te zoeken naar verhalen, anekdotes, sprekers, muziek en voorwerpen, wordt de identiteit van de overledene gevormd. Er ontstaat een portret van de overledene dat inherent verbonden is met de betekenis van de overledene voor de nabestaanden en voor zijn of haar leefomgeving. Zo wordt er een uitvaart voorbereid waarin de uitvaartdeelnemers – zowel de overledene als de nabestaanden – tegelijk onderwerp en publiek zijn.

In termen van religie laat onze studie zien dat kerkelijke en niet-kerkelijke experts een vergelijkbare rol vervullen in de inhoudelijk voorbereidingen. Bovendien volgen de voorbereidingsgesprekken een overeenkomstig patroon, beginnend bij het leven van de overledene. Er zijn echter ook verschillen, die vooral betrekking hebben op de verantwoordelijkheid van de expert. In rooms-katholieke en protestantse uitvaarten legt de expert niet alleen verantwoording af aan de nabestaanden en de overledene, maar ook aan de christelijke traditie en eigen geloofsgemeenschap. Hoewel er een liturgisch kader bestaat,

zien we een continu proces van onderhandeling, waarbij de rituele praktijken en betekenissen worden vertaald naar het leven en het referentiekader van de betrokkenen. Door middel van deze vertaalslag wordt de uitvaart betekenisvol gemaakt voor een heterogene groep uitvaartdeelnemers, ook wanneer de aanwezigen geen affiniteit hebben met de christelijke liturgie.

Rituele rollen

Met de opkomst van persoonlijke uitvaarten zijn de rituele rollen van de betrokkenen veranderd. In de regel- en voorbereidingsgesprekken zijn de nabestaanden leidend, en zijn de uitvaartverzorgers en rituele experts veelal begeleidend. Er ontstaat een proces van co-creatie, waarin experts hun rol als 'faciliterend' of 'minimaal' beschrijven. Uiteindelijk zijn het de nabestaanden die beslissen over de inhoud en structuur van de uitvaart, weliswaar geïnformeerd door de wensen van de overledene en de expertise van de uitvaartverzorger en/of rituele expert. Hoewel de toegenomen betrokkenheid van nabestaanden suggereert dat de rol van funeraire experts kleiner wordt, illustreert onze studie het tegendeel. Om ritueel te laten 'werken', moeten experts steeds meer thuis zijn op het gebied van rituele kritiek en onderhandeling. Bovendien wordt van hen verwacht te kunnen inspelen op de al dan niet aanwezige expertise van nabestaanden. Daarnaast geldt dat er van kerkelijke experts sensitiviteit wordt verlangd betreffende hun dubbele verantwoordelijkheid naar traditie en nabestaanden.

In het uitvaartlandschap ontstaan ook nieuwe rituele rollen. Onafhankelijke rituele experts – vaak ritueelbegeleiders genoemd – hebben een plek veroverd en helpen nabestaanden vorm te geven aan een persoonlijke uitvaart. De grootte van hun rol wordt bepaald door de wensen van nabestaanden, zoals we dat veelal ook bij religieuze experts zien. Hoewel slechts zes procent van onze uitvaarten door een ritueelbegeleider werd begeleid en hoewel er grote verschillen bestaan tussen ondernemingen die regelmatig of juist zelden met ritueelbegeleiders werken, heeft de opkomst van deze groep vragen opgeroepen over de taakomschrijving van uitvaartverzorgers. De grenzen van hun rol als 'uitvaartfacilitator' worden steeds vaker opgezocht, en hun verantwoordelijkheid betreffende de inhoud van de uitvaart is onderwerp van debat geworden.

De zorg voor het lichaam van de overledene

Met het oog op betekenisverlening is ook de verzorging van de overledene van belang. Nabestaanden kunnen kleding en accessoires voor hun overledene kiezen, hebben zeggenschap over het postmortale uiterlijk van de overledene en

kunnen de mortuariummedewerkers helpen de overledene te wassen, verzorgen en kleden. Tijdens de verzorging worden de menselijke kwaliteiten van de overledene benadrukt en hersteld, waardoor het lijk tot lichaam getransformeerd wordt en zowel levenloze als bezielde kenmerken krijgt toegeschreven.

Dit liminele karakter van het lichaam komt niet slechts naar voren in de zorg om uiterlijke kenmerken, maar ook in de zorg voor de zintuigen en voorkeuren van de overledene. Er wordt bijvoorbeeld comfortabele kleding gekozen, wat suggereert dat het lichaam een vorm van bewustzijn in zich draagt en duidt op een situationele vorm van voortbestaan. Tegelijkertijd zien we dat de omgang met het lichaam op heel andere noties kan duiden. Sommige nabestaanden zagen het lichaam als residu, als een omhulsel dat geen zorg nodig heeft, maar slechts in praktische zin een bestemming dient te krijgen. Het zijn echter niet alleen de nabestaanden die inspraak hebben in de postmortale verzorging. Onder professionals konden we een zorgdiscours observeren waarin waardigheid centraal staat. De daadwerkelijke zorg voor de overledene wordt gebaseerd op wat als waardig wordt beschouwd door de nabestaanden *en* de professionals.

Tot slot is het fundamenteel om de situationaliteit van ervaringen rond het liminele lichaam te benadrukken. Hoewel mensen het levenloze karakter van het lichaam benadrukten rond het moment van overlijden, waarbij men een scheiding ervaart tussen leven en dood, zien we dat dit levenloze karakter zowel bevestigd als uitgedaagd wordt door het toeschrijven van bezielde en levenloze kwaliteiten aan het lichaam gedurende de fase voor de uitvaart.

De uitvaart als uitdrukking van symbolische onsterfelijkheid

In de hoofdstukken 2 en 3 richten we ons ook op de uitvaartdienst zelf. Daarbij geven we een antwoord op de vraag *welke rituele handelingen van betekenis zijn in de uitvaarten van rooms-katholieke, protestantse en niet-kerkelijke nabestaanden*. Nabestaanden benadrukken het belang van persoonlijke betekenis in de uitvaart. Persoonlijk verwijst hier naar de gedachte dat de uitvaart moet aansluiten bij de wensen en identiteiten van de betrokkenen, die zowel religieus als niet-religieus kunnen zijn. Het zijn dan ook de rituele elementen die ruimte bieden voor de eigen levensstijl, zoals speeches, muziek, en het samenkomen met anderen, die het sterkst gewaardeerd worden door nabestaanden.

Deze uitdrukkingen van persoonlijke betekenis zijn geenszins triviaal. In persoonlijke uitvaarten wordt het leven van de overledene niet alleen herinnerd en gevierd, maar ook getranscendeerd, waarbij nabestaanden de dood symbolisch uitdagen en overwinnen. Onze studie illustreert dat we hedendaagse

uitvaarten kunnen begrijpen als collectieve uitdrukkingen van symbolische onsterfelijkheid, die de aanwezigen in staat stellen de continuïteit van het leven te omarmen in antwoord op de sociale en emotionele breuk die de dood veroorzaakt. Om de uitvaart deze functie te laten vervullen, worden diverse modaliteiten van symbolisch onsterfelijkheid ingezet in de structuur en betekenis van rituele elementen.

Via religieuze, biologische, creatieve, materiële en natuurlijke symbolen wordt de temporaliteit van het individuele leven overstegen. Dit komt niet alleen naar voren in beelden van het voortleven in de natuur, de hemel of in objecten die de overledene overleven, maar tevens in de structuur van de uitvaart. De continuïteit en de betekenis van het (samen)leven wordt benadrukt in het bijeenkomen van uitvaartdeelnemers die hun steun betuigen, in het samenkomen van de geloofsgemeenschap en in het uitvoeren van bepaalde handelingen door specifieke mensen. Zo is de uitvaart zelf een middel om de postmortale identiteit van de overledene vorm te geven en uit te drukken.

In al deze collectieve uitdrukkingen van symbolische onsterfelijkheid bewegen de verschillende modaliteiten door elkaar, waardoor polysemische rituele symbolen ontstaan die de heterogene groep uitvaartdeelnemers met elkaar verbinden. Door het gebruik in de uitvaart krijgen deze symbolen bovendien een bijzondere waarde, waardoor zij vaak een rol blijven spelen in het proces van betekenisverlening na de afscheidsceremonie.

Crematiepraktijken

In hoofdstuk 4 richten we ons op crematie. Daarbij geven we antwoord op de vraag *welke crematiepraktijken van betekenis zijn voor rooms-katholieke, protestantse en niet-kerkelijke nabestaanden.* Praktijken rond crematie en asbestemming worden in de Nederlandse uitvaartpraktijk en in het academisch discours vaak omschreven als belangrijk en waardevol. Ons onderzoek illustreert dat crematiepraktijken niet alleen mogelijkheden bieden om zin en vorm te geven aan de dood, maar de nabestaanden ook voor uitdagingen stellen.

De invoering van de overledene

Wanneer de uitvaartdienst ten einde loopt, moet er afscheid worden genomen van de overledene. Bij een crematie zijn er verschillende manieren om dat vorm te geven, afhankelijk van de wensen van de betrokkenen en de mogelijkheden in het crematorium. Hoewel een aantal praktijken, zoals het langs de kist lopen aan het einde van de dienst, gemeengoed zijn geworden in de Nederland, vinden er

ook continu ontwikkelingen plaats. Eén van die ontwikkelingen betreft de invoering van de overledene. Ons onderzoek laat zien dat nabestaanden hun overledene steeds vaker tot de oven of de ovenruimte willen begeleiden en crematoria passen hier hun faciliteiten op aan. Hoewel het aanwezig zijn bij de invoering door onze surveyrespondenten als zeer belangrijk werd gewaardeerd, laten getuigenissen van nabestaanden tegelijkertijd diverse uitdagingen zien. Daarbij speelt vooral het gebrek aan kennis en voorlichting een rol. Hoewel experts benadrukken dat het belangrijk is nabestaanden zo goed mogelijk te begeleiden, laat ons onderzoek zien dat er meningsverschillen bestaan onder professionals over het al dan niet aanwezig zijn bij de invoering. Of het zien van de invoering het afscheid nemen bevordert of bemoeilijkt, is onderwerp van debat.

Asuitgifte

Zoals is vastgelegd in de Nederlandse Wet op de Lijkbezorging, vindt pas een maand na de crematie de asuitgifte plaats. Ook hier treffen we diverse uitdagingen aan. Ons onderzoek laat zien dat het voor professionals en nabestaanden lastig anticiperen is op het respectievelijke uitgeven of ontvangen van de as. Hoewel nabestaanden gedurende de wachttijd vaak hebben nagedacht over de asuitgifte en de asbestemming, gaat de daadwerkelijke asuitgifte veelal gepaard met onverwachte emoties. Voor sommigen is de hoeveelheid as, zo'n twee kilo, een verrassing, en dit kan de initiële plannen voor de asbestemming onmogelijk maken. Daarnaast speelt de liminaliteit van de as een rol. De as is een draagbaar persoon-object, zowel levenloos als bezield, dat symbool staat voor de overledene. De as verwijst niet alleen naar de overledene, maar *is* de overledene, en draagt zo een bijzondere intensiteit in zich. Ook de relatie met de overledene speelt een rol. Wanneer nabestaanden de aanwezigheid van de overledene (te sterk) ervaren in hun dagelijks leven, kan de asuitgifte een hele uitdaging zijn.

Asbestemming en crematiemotieven

Na de as in ontvangst te hebben genomen, moeten nabestaanden een keuze maken voor een tijdelijke en/of uiteindelijke bestemming. Hoewel de liminele materialiteit van de as uitdagingen biedt aan nabestaanden, zorgt die materialiteit er tegelijkertijd voor dat nabestaanden kunnen antwoorden op de ambiguïteit van de as. Door de as een bestemming te geven, worden haar liminele eigenschappen verminderd.

Het verstrooien van de as en het creëren van as-objecten waren de meest voorkomende vormen van asbestemming onder onze respondenten, en een-

derde van hen gaf aan meerdere bestemmingen voor de as te hebben gekozen, bijvoorbeeld door een gedeelte te verstrooien en een gedeelte te verdelen onder familieleden. Daarnaast laat ons onderzoek zien dat de mogelijkheden rond asbestemming een belangrijk motief zijn om voor een crematie te kiezen. Andere significante motieven waren de afwezigheid van grafonderhoud en, gelijk de andere keuzes rond de uitvaart, de wensen van de overledene.

Ambigue materialiteit, ambigue betekenis

Tot slot hebben we onderzocht of mensen de as als belangrijk beschouwen, of zij de as als iets sacraals apart zetten en of de as een focuspunt is voor het continueren van relaties met de overledene. Nabestaanden waardeerden deze kenmerken van de as neutraal, waarbij we een licht negatieve waardering vonden onder nabestaanden zonder kerkelijke affiliatie, van wie ruim 80 procent betrokken was bij een crematieplechtigheid. Verdere verkenning van deze attitudes liet zien dat mensen een hogere waarde toeschrijven aan de as wanneer zij aanwezig zijn geweest bij de invoering van de overledene en wanneer zij vormen van asbestemming kiezen die de overledene in fysieke nabijheid houden. Dit suggereert dat deze praktijken een meer intieme connectie met de materiële resten van het lichaam bewerkstelligen. Respondenten die de as verstrooien waardeerden de bovengenoemde kwaliteiten van de as minder positief.

Onze kwalitatieve interviews illustreren dat een lage waardering van de gecremeerde resten niet impliceert dat die resten als betekenisloos worden ervaren. In plaats daarvan zien we dat nabestaanden andere eigenschappen van de as benadrukken. De menselijke resten hebben een sociaal leven. Ze zijn ingebed in materiële praktijken en sociale relaties, en roepen een discours van zorg op onder nabestaanden. Waar de as sommige nabestaanden de mogelijkheid geeft de overledene nabij te houden, is voor anderen juist de fluïditeit en de mobiliteit van de as betekenisvol. Niet de materialiteit zelf, maar het feit dat de materialiteit het mogelijk maakt nabijheid en afstand te creëren, en het zo mogelijk maakt een nieuwe plaats te creëren voor de overledene, wordt als waardevol beschouwd. Daarnaast hebben we gezien dat de as sociale en morele verplichtingen oproept onder nabestaanden omdat er een tijdelijke en uiteindelijke bestemming voor de as gevonden moet worden. Door het tijdelijke karakter van sommige bestemmingen wordt het zorgdiscours en het langdurig proces van ritueel vormgeven aan de dood verlengd. Dit roept de vraag op of er daadwerkelijk een uiteindelijke bestemming gevonden kan worden.

Geleefde hiernamaalsvoorstellingen

In hoofdstuk vijf richten we ons op hiernamaalsvoorstellingen en geven we antwoord op de vraag *welke noties van symbolische onsterfelijkheid naar voren komen in attitudes en narratieven van mensen met een recente verlieservaring.* In lijn met eerder onderzoek (Quartier 2007, Wojtkowiak 2011) laat onze studie zien dat traditionele concepten van een leven na de dood zijn afgenomen onder nabestaanden, ten gunste van persoonlijke en impliciete noties van een hiernamaals. Op basis van het concept symbolische onsterfelijkheid geven we vervolgens aandacht aan de dynamiek van traditionele en niet-traditionele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen en illustreren we dat hiernamaalsvoorstellingen gearticuleerd en gevormd worden op basis van de verbeelding in specifieke situaties.

In interviews met nabestaanden die vertrouwd waren met christelijke meta-narratieven kwamen traditionele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen naar voren, verbonden met de religieuze modaliteit van symbolische onsterfelijkheid. Beelden van een hemel of paradijs werden echter niet gearticuleerd als zelfstandige of reële entiteiten, maar werden met name geuit om het 'mysterie van de dood' te onderstrepen. Ze werden ingezet als symbolen om uit te drukken dat men niet kan weten wat er na de dood gebeurt. In narratieven van nabestaanden werd ook via niet-traditionele voorstellingen, verbonden met de andere modaliteiten van symbolische onsterfelijkheid, het mysterie van de dood gearticuleerd.

Daarnaast benadrukt ons onderzoek het geleefde karakter van hiernamaalsvoorstellingen. In relatie tot de veranderende rol van religie in de samenleving zien we niet alleen dat nabestaanden niet of in mindere mate instemmen met traditionele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen, maar ook dat de religieuze vocabulaires vervagen. Daarbij verliezen traditionele, of kerkelijke, beelden van een hiernamaals hun prominentie en exclusiviteit en krijgen ze in toenemende mate een veelheid van betekenissen toebedeeld. Hiernamaalsvoorstellingen, zowel traditioneel als niet-traditioneel, worden niet kant-en-klaar uit een schap gehaald, maar worden telkens opnieuw verbeeld en gearticuleerd op basis van persoonlijke ervaringen. Het is deze herverbeelding op basis waarvan mensen zin geven aan leven en dood, en aan de dood van een naaste in het bijzonder.

Tot slot waren er narratieven van mensen die expliciet niet instemden met traditionele hiernamaalsvoorstellingen. Zij werden als onmogelijk, niet waar of als een fantasie beschreven. Dit betekent echter niet dat mensen geen andere vormen van symbolische onsterfelijkheid articuleerden. Biologische en sociale relaties, creativiteit, natuurlijke symbolen en objecten speelden alle een prominente rol in de verhalen van de geïnterviewden. Bovenal waren voort-

gaande relaties met de doden aanwezig in exegetische narratieven over praktijken. Naast abstracte beelden van een hiernamaals, zoals hemel, paradijs of voortleven in het universum, zijn het juist deze relaties die van ultieme betekenis blijken in confrontatie met de dood.

Transformerende banden tussen levenden en doden

In hoofdstuk zes staan de relaties tussen de levenden en doden centraal en beantwoorden we de vraag *of, en zo ja, hoe relaties tussen de levenden en doden geritualiseerd worden in de periode na de uitvaart.* Onze studie laat zien dat nabestaanden hun relatie met de overledene, en daarmee de eigen sociale status en die van de overledene, transformeren door middel van persoonlijke en accumulatieve separatie-, transitie- en incorporatiepraktijken met materiële objecten in de vernaculaire, niet-institutionele ruimte. Daarbij spelen persoonlijke bezittingen van de overledene en as-objecten een prominente rol. Enerzijds roepen deze objecten de af- en aanwezigheid van de dode op. Anderzijds worden ze ingezet om de (gedeelde) identiteit van de overledene en nabestaanden (opnieuw) te vormen, of de overledene een nieuwe bestemming te geven.

Onze studie illustreert dat materiële praktijken van nabestaanden parallel lopen met veranderingen in postmortale relaties. Door objecten door de ruimte te verplaatsen – in de dagelijkse leefomgeving of juist kilometers daar vandaan –, wordt er een verandering in sociale status uitgedrukt en deze wordt door de handeling zelf versterkt. Delen van de identiteit van de overledene worden geïntegreerd in nieuwe ruimten of objecten, waarbij betekenisvolle plaatsen ontstaan, en waarbij ook de waarde van de voorwerpen zelf verandert. Door dergelijke praktijken worden banden aangehaald of afgezwakt, en worden delen van de identiteit van de overledene in retrospectief geïdealiseerd of vervuld.

Bovenal hebben we geïllustreerd dat het louter kijken naar de aanwezigheid van voorwerpen de dynamiek van postmortale relaties verhult. De aanwezigheid van een object duidt niet per definitie op het nabij houden van de overledene, maar kan juist een uitdrukking zijn van het verzwakken van banden. Daarnaast hebben we laten zien dat de identiteit van de overledene verbonden is met een veelheid van voorwerpen. Wanneer een gedeelte van de identiteit door ritueel handelen afwezig wordt gemaakt, bijvoorbeeld door de as buiten de leefomgeving te verstrooien, behouden andere objecten die verbonden zijn met de overledene een plaats in het leven van nabestaanden. In algemene zin, of op specifieke momenten, kunnen deze voorwerpen worden gebruikt om de relatie opnieuw te openen of te veranderen. Dus, separaties, transities en incorporaties

van de overledene in het leven van diens nabestaanden kunnen we niet begrijpen als een lineair proces met een eenduidige uitkomst, maar als een voortdurend proces van onderhandeling.

Tot slot hebben we aandacht gegeven aan de collectieve dimensie van transformerende banden tussen de levenden en doden. De macht om een relatie te veranderen ligt immers niet alleen bij de nabestaande, maar is verbonden met diens sociale omgeving. Nabestaanden kunnen veranderingen in hun relatie met de overledene zichtbaar maken voor anderen en in het (dis)continueren van postmortale relaties nemen zij de normen, waarden en emoties van anderen in overweging. De verplaatsing van objecten kan bijvoorbeeld tegengewerkt of gestimuleerd worden door vrienden en familieleden. Daarnaast worden relaties met de doden beïnvloed door wat als 'normale' rouw wordt begrepen in de sociaal-culturele context waarin mensen leven. Zoals in eerder onderzoek was de invloed van het *breaking bonds* discours duidelijk zichtbaar in de belevingswereld van nabestaanden in deze studie.

Situationele geloofsvoorstellingen in confrontatie met de dood

In het laatste hoofdstuk wordt deze studie samengevat, reflecteren we op de theoretische inzichten die de studie biedt betreffende religie, ritueel en geloof en beantwoorden we de vraag *welke situationele geloofsvoorstellingen ontstaan in de uitvaart- en rouwpraktijken van rooms-katholieke, protestantse en religieus ongeaffilieerde nabestaanden in Nederland.* Onze studie illustreert dat nabestaanden in het langdurige proces van ritueel vormgeven aan de dood worden meegenomen in diverse fasen van scheiding, transitie, en integratie, op basis van de manieren waarop zij de conditie van de overledene begrijpen en ervaren. In dit proces worden de situationele geloofsvoorstellingen van nabestaanden beinvloed door rituele praktijken en geven voorstellingen tegelijkertijd vorm aan ritueel handelen. Situationele geloofsvoorstellingen ontstaan in interactie met praktijken en verhouden zich tot de (veronderstelde) conditie van de overledene. Door te kijken naar de rol van het lichaam, de as en de persoonlijke bezittingen van de overledene hebben we benadrukt dat materiële 'objecten' de aanwezigheid en afwezigheid van de doden oproepen en nabestaanden handvatten bieden om hun relatie met de overledene te transformeren. Rituele praktijken en voorwerpen zijn dus belangrijke instrumenten om situationele geloofsvoorstellingen te creëren en te reconstrueren. Nabestaanden laten de overledene niet simpelweg los, maar geven zin en vorm aan de dood door de overledene een nieuwe, vaak fysieke plaats te geven in het alledaagse leven.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brenda Mathijssen (1989) received her MA degree in Religious Studies at Radboud University in 2012 (*cum laude),* with a particular focus on religion and culture. During her studies, she developed a strong interest in lived and material religion, meaning-making, ritual, and death. Between 2013 and 2017 she conducted her doctoral research at the Department of Comparative Religion, Radboud University, where she also joined the Centre for Thanatology. She has published several refereed articles, for example on the social lives of cremated remains (*Death Studies* 2017) and on the dynamics of continuing bonds (*Mortality,* forthcoming). Additionally, she has co-edited a volume on *Changing European Death Ways* (Lit Verlag 2013) as well as a special issue in Death Studies on historical, anthropological, and sociological approaches to death (2017). On the basis of her research, she developed various dissemination activities, like workshops for funeral directors and public lectures, which subsequently resulted in a co-written book on Dutch funerary culture for a broad audience, entitled *Dood. Wegwijs in de Nederlandse Uitvaartcultuur* (Parthenon 2017). In 2015, she worked as a visiting researcher at the Centre for Death and Life Studies at Durham University. Currently, she is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Geography and Environmental Science at the University of Reading, where she studies deathscapes and diversity in multicultural England and Wales.